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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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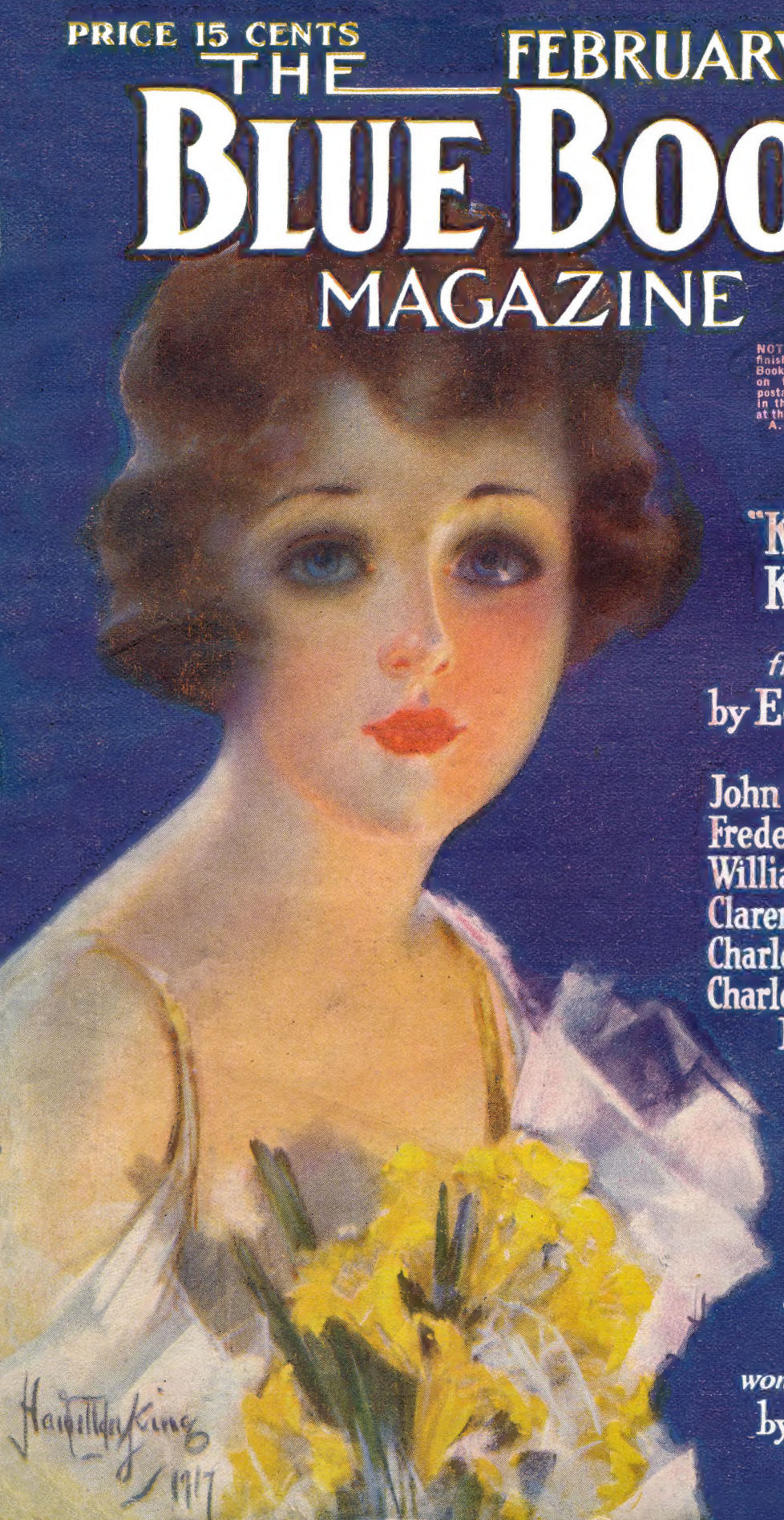

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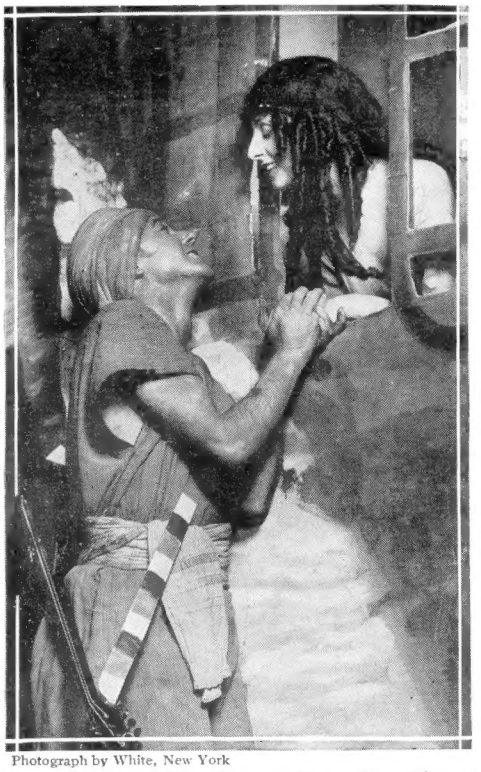
"FOR HONOR"
the story of a woman and an officer
by J. Frank Davis

What's What in the Theater

Channing Pollock's Brilliant Critique

With the authority of a practiced playwright and the keen discernment of a veteran critic, Channing Pollock offers in "Gaud" the one wholly dependable and always interesting review of the highly decorated plays that have been produced this month. And Mr. Pollock well deserves his high reputation for wit in this fascinating article, too.



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George Rasely and Tessa Kosta in "Chu Chin Chow."

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

Vol. XXVI No. 4

For Honor

by J. Frank Davis

First Lieutenant Garnet Brice, at early twilight of a June day, walked briskly past the rows of officers' houses at Fort Sam Houston, perfunctorily returned the salute of the sentry on duty at the big gate and swung aboard a trolley-car bound for the city. He was in civilian clothes.

He should have been present for early drill, the following morning. At noon, when he still had not reported, his captain reluctantly took cognizance of his absence. Although Brice's record was good, and he was never known to dissipate, even the steadiest of young officers sometimes do foolish things. Most probable among the plausible explanations was that he had stayed up very late and was now oversleeping himself in some downtown hotel.

This guess ceased to be a likely one when retreat sounded that evening, with Lieutenant Brice still absent. The captain consulted with Colonel Eldridge, the regimental commander. They became a bit worried. This worry deepened when a search of Brice's quarters disclosed the fact that not only was every article of uniform belonging to the young officer there, but also various other things that he would be expected to have on his person, including his watch, a roll of bills and even loose silver in a pocket.

A partial explanation of this mystery, although it did not help a particle to account for his continued absence, was furnished a day later, when the disappearance became the talk of the post, by Lieutenant Millett, of another company of Brice's regiment. Lieutenant Millett said that Brice, on the evening when he was last seen, stopped at his house, which was much nearer the gate than Brice's quarters, and hurriedly borrowed five dollars and a pocket handkerchief. Brice told him he had hastily changed into the clothes he was wearing and had quite overlooked transferring any of his possessions. The loan until morning would save him the trouble of going back.

Brice, Lieutenant Millett said, acted exactly as usual. He stopped only a minute and seemed to be in great haste, but while he was getting the handkerchief and money, he joked about his carelessness in leaving his quarters penniless and promised to assess himself a penalty at the officers' club on the first convenient occasion.

Within twenty-four hours the Colonel had the city and county hospitals searched and the police record of accidents within the city limits combed to make certain there was no unidentified victim who might answer Brice's description. This produced only a negative result. The young man's fellow-officers did everything they could think of, without avail. After a few days the help of the newspapers was enlisted, but it amounted to naught. From the moment he sprang aboard the city-bound trolley-car, Brice might have dematerialized into the air, for all trace that could be found of him.

JUNE passed, and July. Army officers seeking relief from the heat of the Southwestern summer under electric fans and on roof-gardens, turned by degrees to other topics of conversation than the disappearance of their associate. Lieutenant Garnet Brice, after having been carried on the rolls for ninety days as "Absent," in accordance with regulations, was reported to the War Department as "Missing."

In due time, and as a matter of routine, the lieutenants below him on the army list moved up a number, and his place was filled. Five years later there came a day when important increases were made in the army establishment, with the result that many first lieutenants became captains. The list of promotions extended far below Brice's old number. By that time all but a few of his army friends had forgotten him; his disappearance, once a common subject of speculation at the post, had passed out of most men's minds.

Colonel Eldridge became a brigadier-general and was transferred to a post in the East. He had liked Brice, and he never entirely forgot him. He believed, of course, that the young man was dead; there was no other reasonable explanation. But where he died, and how—these were conundrums not likely to be answered, at least this side of the day when all secrets shall be made known.

BUT Lieutenant Brice was not dead. He was in a light and care-free mood, that June evening in 1911, as he stepped briskly past the officers' houses toward the great gate of the post. He was in a considerable hurry because, just as he was almost ready to leave his quarters, a freshly pressed suit of clothes that should have come hours before had been delivered, and he had decided to change into it. So much hurried he was, in fact, that he completely neglected to change his belongings from the other clothes that he had donned when his day's work was done. So, happening to drop a hand into his pocket when he was seven or eight houses from his own quarters, he suddenly became aware that he had not a cent or a pocket handkerchief or anything else whatever but empty pockets.

He had a military promptness in keeping appointments. He had told Mrs. Dassler he would be at her house at eight-thirty o'clock. Already there was a possibility that he would be late. He saved the minutes that would be needed to return to his rooms by dropping in on Tom Millett, who cheerfully and promptly accommodated him with money and a handkerchief. He went to town in the street-car, transferred to the San Sebastian Avenue line and rode to Huisache Heights. A walk of less than three blocks from the car brought him to the residence of Mr. Walter Dassler. As he ascended the steps, he smiled with satisfaction at the time he had made; a clock somewhere inside the house chimed the half-hour.

Mrs. Dassler herself opened the door to his ring. She was a petite, vivacious girl of twenty-five, with long-lashed violet eyes which she used for desperate flirtations. This flirtation with Brice was her latest, although perhaps not her most desperate. It had been in progress barely a fortnight, and was giving much pleasure to both, without really being especially dangerous to either.

Garnet Brice had accumulated much wisdom during his thirty years. Among other things, he had learned a great deal about women. He believed he could distinguish between those who meant a flirtation to be harmless and those who sought the other kind. He had appraised Mrs. Dassler as a frivolous young woman with no real evil in her—and he had appraised her correctly. Foolish she might be, but not at all bad.

Brice had never seen Mr. Dassler. He understood, rather vaguely, that he was nearly twice as old as Mrs. Dassler, prosperous without possessing really great wealth, and entirely engrossed in his business, which kept him away from home a great deal of the time. Far from blaming Mrs. Dassler for seeking relaxation during his absences in coquettish adventures. Brice thought he saw that the reason for her little affairs lay in ennui and something akin to loneliness. Brice was not at all averse to helping make her loneliness more bearable, and he had plunged into one of those violent flirtations which begin nowhere in particular, are probably fated to end nowhere in particular and mean nothing at all.

THIS was the first time he had called at her home. He observed the house with a commending eye. It was a wide, deep building of the "bungalow" pattern, only one story high, although covering much more ground than most city bungalows. It faced north on a hillside that sloped sharply away to the south, so that the floor, which was barely above the level of the lawn at the front, was at the back a dozen feet or more above the ground. He did not notice all these things at once; observation of this peculiarity of location came afterward.

"Good evening! Come in. Delighted to see you!" Mrs. Dassler said. As he made his salutations and almost before she had finished shaking hands, she commented on the oppressive heat of the evening. "There aren't any cool spots on this side of the house," she said. "Let's go to the outside sitting-room; there's always a breeze there. It is on the southeast corner, of course."

As she had omitted to take his hat or to mention it, he carried it with him across a wide living-room into a hall and past doors opening into various rooms. They came out at the back of the house into a screened porch, furnished and lighted in a manner indicating that it was generally used as an evening living-room.

She noticed, as she indicated a chair and asked him to sit, that he still carried his hat.

"Why, how stupid of me!" she said, and relieved him of it, putting it on a table. He observed then, with some surprise, that she seemed a trifle embarrassed. "The servants," she added, "—they are both away. Darkies cannot be expected to stay in the house on Juneteenth." She paused a bare second —then went on: "I had forgotten."

Brice, not dependent upon colored domestic servants, also had not remembered that it was June nineteenth, which is Emancipation Day in Texas, the one day which every negro expects to have more or less to himself. He instantly saw the point. He also appreciated the cause of Mrs. Dassler's embarrassment. She found herself quite alone in the house with him, a contingency that had not occurred to her when she invited him.

He rose and spoke frankly. "Really," he said, "I am sorry. Perhaps it might be just as well if I made this call some other evening. It will be quite all right, really."

Mrs. Dassler laughed, not entirely at her ease but endeavoring to be. "Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I certainly shall not let you run away the moment you have arrived. We can chaperon ourselves, I should think. Sit down again; there is no reason for you to hurry. Don't."

This was the lady's affair, and he resumed his seat, quite satisfied if she was. They talked for ten or fifteen minutes—conversation of no significance whatever. The dialogue had a sudden interruption when Mrs. Dassler turned her head, listening, and said nervously:

"That automobile stopped in front of this house. I wonder who it can be. Excuse me a moment, please."

She stepped quickly from the porch into the hall.

LIEUTENANT BRICE looked about him. To the left of the hallway through which he had come he saw a room in which a single shaded light was burning. It looked like a bedroom or boudoir. His eyes turned from that direction to the screen wall, through which, somewhat below him, he could see the lights of the city. He noted how the ground fell away behind the house. There was no other building between him and the next cross-street to the south, and he could see the grass glistening, still wet from a sharp thunder-shower that had rolled up late in the afternoon. A garage and one or two clumps of small trees stood in this wide lot. These things he noticed idly. Then, quickly, he came to his feet as Mrs. Dassler entered.

She came so softly and so swiftly that she was in the screened room before he knew it. He had but a glance at her face—a glance, however, that was enough to show him consternation, fear, almost tragedy, in it—before she reached for the electric button and switched off the light.

"My husband!" she gasped. "I thought he was in St. Louis. He is stopping by the motor to gather up his bags."

"But my dear Mrs. Dassler! You mustn't do that!" Brice protested. "Let me meet him. We know there isn't any harm—" He made a step toward the light-switch, but she interposed. He felt her tremble violently as she grasped his arm.

"No!" she whispered. "Oh, he mustn't find you here. You must go away—out through the back door, or a window. You *must!*"

"But I can't. That isn't any way to do. That would make it look—"

The sound of heavy feet on the front gallery signified that Mr. Dassler and the chauffeur were bringing the luggage. Brice could visualize Mr. Dassler at this moment going into his pocket for his latchkey.

"Oh, quick!" she urged. "You *must!* You *must!* Oh, you don't understand! He is jealous—wildly jealous. He is violent. He—" She thrust her visitor's hat into his hand and actually tugged at him to make him obey. "He threatened—once," she panted, "to kill me. He will—oh, he will! You can't get out of this porch; you can't get through the screen. Quick! Into this room. You can drop through the window."

Further protestations were useless. Brice, even while he let Mrs. Dassler half lead, half push him into the room with the shaded light, swore a round oath to himself never again to be caught in a compromising situation the very innocence of which made it all the more exasperating. At the same time his mind, trained to function rapidly, planned a program. He would drop from the window, dodge through those tree and past that garage and make a call on an acquaintance three blocks away.

FROM the front of the house came the sound of a slamming door. A voice called, "Lora! Oh, Lora! Where are you?" Footsteps sounded inside the house.

Mrs. Dassler's hand went to her throat, and she swayed, half fainting. Brice realized it was too late. Dassler would hear him drop from the window. He would see him crossing the lot. The interpretation that he would give to this might be the worst. Too late! And like lightning came another thought—a horrifying one. It was also too late to pass out of this room to the screened porch again without being seen from the hallway. And the screened porch was unlighted.

While Dassler was setting down his bags and taking ten heavy steps toward the rear of the house, Brice thought of the one thing that could be done, and he did it.

He saw the screen to the window was loosed. Surveying the room quickly, he observed a chiffonier close to the window. He whispered to Mrs. Dassler, commandingly:

"Listen! Don't reply. I'm a burglar. You heard me here. You came in. I was at the chiffonier. I grabbed you. Then you screamed. Don't worry. Stick to it. Describe me as being short,

light and thick-set. I'll get away. Now!"

He lifted out the top drawer of the chiffonier and set it noiselessly on the floor. He took a handful of things out of it and scattered them. Then he turned to Mrs. Dassler. "Scream!" he whispered.

Fear paralyzed her throat. "You've *got* to, or he'll wonder why you didn't!" he told her fiercely. He seized her and shook her roughly. She screamed.

Turning, he let himself quickly through the window and dropped to the ground. It was sloping and muddy. He fell, and his ankle turned under him. He scrambled up, intent only on covering a hundred yards in the shortest possible time and getting over to the next street—whence he could saunter to his friend's house, confident that neither police nor anyone else would confuse a tall, dark army officer with a short, light, thick-set crook. But instantly he sank back again with a moan of pain, while black spots danced before his eyes.

Again he struggled up. He heard sounds of confusion behind him, a door bang open close at hand, and feet coming down long stairs.

With sickening force there came to him the true appreciation of his predicament—and hers.

He groaned, rolled over on his face, and daubed himself with mud. He grimed his clothes, his face, his hands. He even put mud in his hair.

He sat up then, to face an aggressive, wide-shouldered man, who held a large pistol competently pointing in his direction, and who leaned over and searched him quickly for a concealed weapon. At the top of the outdoor steps, white-faced and wide-eyed, he had a glimpse of Mrs. Dassler staring down at them.

"I've got him, Lora!" Dassler called. "Go to the telephone and call police headquarters."

"I—I can't, Walter," she faltered. "I know I couldn't talk over the phone."

Her husband's reply was prompt. "One of us has to. Can you guard him while I go? Come down here. Take this pistol. Don't get too near him. If he tries to get away, shoot him in the leg." He spoke to Brice. "I wouldn't advise you to try it," he said. "My wife knows how to shoot."

SLOWLY Mrs. Dassler came down the steps and took the weapon. Her husband ran up and into the house, calling over his shoulder that he would be back in three minutes. The moment he was out of sight she bent over the lieutenant.

"Hurry!" she exclaimed. "I'll drop the pistol in the mud, and when you are halfway across the street, I'll fire a shot into the ground and say I got too close to you and that you knocked the gun out of my hand and ran, and that when I picked it up you were so far away I missed you."

"No use!" he groaned. "I've sprained my ankle. I couldn't get across this lot in half an hour. We've got to let it go as it lies. The police will take me, and you must act as though I were really a burglar. I'll get out of it some way."

"How?"

Brice, for the life of him couldn't see. Things were now worse than ever. No good construction could possibly be put on his effort to escape. Even if Walter Dassler were not a jealous, violent man, it would strain his credulity to ask him to believe the truth. No one would believe it. With sinking heart, Brice realized he himself probably would not believe it, if it were told about some one else, even though that some one were his best friend. He could not see any light. Yet he realized any attempt on the woman's part to solve their problem would ruin her.

"You must let things take their course," he said. "Never mind what happens—stick to the burglar story. Forget you ever knew me."

"But everybody else does. Who will believe you are a burglar?"

"The police don't know me. I don't know how I am going at this, yet, but I am not going to tell them who I am. Unless some army officer happens to see me at the station— You wont try to straighten it out, will you? It wouldn't do either of us any good."

"Oh, it is terrible!" Mrs. Dassler

moaned. "All my own foolishness. Will you ever forgive me?"

"Steady! Better keep that gun pointed in my general direction; he's coming back. Promise me. Not a word."

"All right," she conceded hesitatingly. "Not a word—unless—unless it should be really *necessary*. If it is—" He saw what she meant, and wondered if things could really go to that length. He couldn't think so far ahead. Besides, his ankle was paining him excruciatingly.

THEY came with a wagon that was a combination of ambulance and police-patrol, and they put him in it. Until then he maintained absolute silence. In the wagon, also, he did not talk except to say, striving not to speak too correctly, that his ankle was swelling and he wished they would get him a doctor as soon as possible. At police headquarters his injury and the seriousness of the charge against him saved him from being put in the general detention-room. He found himself, after the doctor's attentions, in a cell by himself, with two detectives desirous of having speech with him.

"What's your name?" one of them demanded.

He had given much thought to this, during the past half-hour. It should be a name so common that a thousand men might have it, and yet not so extremely common, like John Smith, as to be obviously assumed. There had come into his mind the name of an enlisted man in his company who had died of pneumonia the spring before, leaving no relatives, and he gave it:

"Martin Jones."

"Where's your home?"

"St. Louis."

"What street and number?"

This he declined to answer. He also refused to tell them anything as to his past history, criminal or otherwise.

"All right, feller," the detective who did the talking said. "We'll get it. I know a whole lot about you already. I'll know more by mawnin'." They went away and let him try to sleep.

He felt reasonably sure they could not identify him. The search of his pockets had disclosed only a pocket handkerchief and four dollars and ninety-five cents. His clothes and hat he had bought in Chicago during his last furlough; they bore no marks by which he could be traced. All he had to do was to maintain silence, and nobody would know who he was. And then—he would be sent to prison like any ordinary malefactor.

When his thoughts reached this stage, they violently recoiled, and he set to work to find a way whereby he could identify himself, prove his good reputation and innocence of wrongdoing—and not sacrifice the honor of a woman. And he knew, from the very first, that there was no such exit.

There were exactly two alternatives, and no more. One allowed him to be punished as a criminal. The other entailed the loss of a foolish but innocent woman's good name. He writhed mentally and groaned literally and strove, until his mind ran in ever-speedier circles of confusion, to think of some other way, and always he knew there was none.

And even if the word that would set him free might be spoken, he could not speak it; that went without saying. She had promised she would say the word if it became "necessary." When and how, he wondered, would she think the necessary time had come?

He tried to put himself in her place and figure out what would be her procedure. If he were Mrs. Dassler, he reasoned, he would allow the supposed burglar to be sentenced, let sufficient time pass for all hue and cry and gossip about the circumstances to die away and then go to the governor of the State in secret, confess the exact circumstances under bond of confidence and ask him to right the wrong with a pardon. Any governor of a Southern State, he told himself, would accede to the petition under such circumstances.

This, he somehow convinced himself, was what she would do. He would make her part and his own the easier if he put no obstacles in the way of an early conviction, seeing that he had no defense, could have no defense and that conviction was inevitable. Another thought followed this—that if he made

them give him a trial, she would have to testify in open court against him. He feared she could not do this, nor was it right to expect her to, under oath.

He thanked Heaven he had no relatives to make the matter more complicated. As to his army connection, he felt certain, after the governor had pardoned him, that he could tell his story secretly to the military authorities and they would find a way to reinstate him.

THE detective who had done the talking made it easy for Brice to do his share of this, when he came to the cell early the following morning.

"Hello, Martin," he said.

"Hello," Brice replied.

"I got you placed all right," the plain-clothes man said complacently. "It's the surest thing you know that all you fellers, when you go to use a phony name, stick to the same initials—and usually to one of your own names. So all I had to do was to look at the Chicago pictures, and there you were. Where did you go after you got out of Joliet, last winter? You haven't been here in San 'Ntonio all the time."

"Did I get out of Joliet?" Brice asked.

"Oh, you might just as well can the mystery-stuff. It don't go. You did your stretch in Joliet—the one they turned you loose on last November—for exactly the same kind of a job you were trying to pull last night. There aint any use denyin' it. We've got the goods."

"Was a job like that done by a man named Martin Jones?" It seemed to Brice a real burglar would ask some such question as this.

"Forget that 'Martin Jones' stuff," the detective scoffed. "I tell you we're *wise*. You can't get away with it. Here's your pedigree, all up to date—at least, up to last November. 'John Martin, *alias* Gentleman Jack Martin, all-round crook and second-story worker. Five feet, ten inches tall. Brown eyes, dark hair, well set up. Good dresser. Has good education. Gets his *alias* from fact that he is very particular as to the fit of his clothes, and keeps them always clean and well pressed.' You see there aint any use your denyin' it."

Brice digested this for a moment. If the detective didn't know where he had been since the previous November, the crook Martin evidently was not now "wanted" by some other police-department for any later crime. This meant that policemen from some other city would not be summoned to identify him, and that he would not be held on some other charge.

"I don't deny it, and I don't admit it," he said.

"Fair enough. But listen! You're a foxy gazabo not to carry any papers or anything around in your kick to get yourself identified by, all right, but you're a mutt to have your handkerchiefs marked. It was that wipe of yours that really gave me the tip. Clothes from Chicago—handkerchief marked *M* — phony name, 'Martin Jones.' Look for a guy with a Chicago record, named Martin. All right!

"Now, listen! I aint givin' you the degree or anything, because it aint necessary—not yet. I don't happen to find any other second-story work around here that looks like yours lately, and if you don't make too big a fight against this little charge for last night's job, maybe I wont look for any. Can you walk with that bum ankle of yours, if we get some crutches?"

"I guess so."

"Then we'll get 'em and go over to the County Courthouse. Say! Are you goin' to make us a lot of trouble, gettin' witnesses and all, or are you goin' to be nice?"

"What's the use of making trouble? It's a dead open and shut, isn't it?"

"Meanin' you're goin' to be nice. All right, Jack. We'll get right along and have it over with and we wont make it any harder for you than we have to. After you've had your arraignment, they'll take you over to the jail, and it'll be more comfortable than here. How *is* the bum kicker, this mawnin'? Dassler said, if you hadn't happened to turn it when you jumped, you might have made a get-away. Proud chance! We'd 'a' had you before you'd gone ten blocks. You fellers don't get away in this town."

"It aches like blazes," Brice said simply. "But I can move around on crutches, all right."

A HALF-HOUR later, before a county justice, Brice heard a complaint read, charging that John Martin, with intent to steal, did burglariously break and enter the dwelling-house of Walter Dassler, against the peace and dignity of the State of Texas, and the statutes made and provided.

"You may plead not guilty and have a preliminary hearing, or you may waive examination," the justice said.

"I waive examination," Brice said.

"Have you an attorney?"

"No, and I don't think I need one. I'm ready to plead guilty."

"Was this a robbery with firearms, Mr. Coston?" asked the justice.

"No, Judge," replied the detective. "The prisoner didn't have any pistol on him a-tall."

"Held for the Grand Jury in three thousand dollars bail," the justice said. Within another hour Brice found himself in a cell in the County Jail. Detective Coston told him the Grand Jury was at present in session; it was reasonable to expect his indictment would be returned and his trial reached within two or three weeks.

He spent his days and nights, idly, with unhappy thoughts. No echo came to him of the search that was being made by his superiors for a missing first lieutenant. Nor did any official of the police department, asked to go over records of accidents and sudden illnesses for a victim who might answer to the description of Brice, suspect any connection whatever between the missing soldier and "Gentleman Jack Martin," a Chicago thief, caught in the act of burglary, who did not deny his identity.

Brice was tangled in a web that he could not break, except by an act that he could not commit. He was almost glad when they told him, one day, that his indictment had been reported. A fortnight later, when they informed him he would go to court on the morrow, he welcomed the news. Anything was better than this deadly, hopeless waiting.

ON the following morning, before eight o'clock, Detective Coston came to his cell. If Brice had been familiar with criminal procedure, he would have realized that the detective's proposition to him was an unusual one.

"Well, Jack," Coston said genially, "to-day's the day. You're goin' to plead guilty and take your little medicine, I s'pose. They tell me you aint hired any lawyer."

"I'm going to take my medicine," Brice said. "I hope it isn't too bitter a dose."

"That's exactly what I come over to see you about," said Coston. "It's like this: We've got the goods on you, of course, and we can make the case strong, with all your past record—to say nothin' of a whole lot of information we've picked up since you been in here that you don't know we've got. And you'd get eight or ten years. But fellers that don't make us much trouble, and that aint killers or anything like that, we don't see why we shouldn't be kinda easy on 'em. I says to the chief, yes'day, I says, 'Do you mind my askin' the district attorney to suggest to the court that this here Martin don't get soaked too hard?' And the chief says, 'If this Martin makes it easy for us, why, I don't see why we can't make it a little easier for him. No, I aint got any objection,' he says.

"Now what I'm gettin' at is this: If we have a trial, and have the Dasslers down to testify, and the officers that made the pinch—both of 'em are sleepin' days and they'll have to get up and come to court—and all that trouble, why, we'll let things take their course. But if you want to just plead guilty and not ask for any evidence to be put in against you a-tall, why, then, nobody has to come to appear against you, and we'll get the district attorney to ask for a light stretch. And there you are."

The proposition could not have been made more favorable, from Brice's standpoint. Mrs. Dassler would not have to face him in court. With no protracted trial, the chance that some one in the courtroom might recognize him would be small. He accepted the offer without a second's delay.

HOW could Brice know, unless Coston or some other official told him (and they were taking especial pains not to) that no power on earth could have produced Walter and Lora Dassler in court that day to testify against him? There was no way in which he could learn of the automobile ride Dassler and his wife had taken the evening before around the North Loop —a ride that came to an end with a broken steering-gear, a car turned turtle and a ghastly task for the occupants of the next motor that came along. Dassler was dead when they lifted the car. The beautiful, reckless, foolish Mrs. Dassler, now no longer beautiful or reckless or foolish, gave up her fight for life in the hospital just as the sun was rising, without ever having recovered consciousness.

Brice knew nothing of this when he rose, in court, with a feeling of relief that he did not see Mrs. Dassler there, and pleaded guilty to the charge of burglary. He heard a young assistant district attorney perfunctorily tell the story of his entrance, through a rear window, into the Dassler home, and recommend, in consideration of his plea of guilty and the fact that he was unarmed when he committed the crime, a moderate sentence. He heard the sentence pronounced—three years in the State penitentiary.

He journeyed to Huntsville handcuffed to a young carpenter who had murdered a total stranger, without provocation, in a saloon. The young carpenter had many friends, notwithstanding his passion for strong drink and the violence that alcohol stirred in his heart, and his trial had been a hard-fought and for that reason quite a celebrated case.

He had pleaded not guilty by reason of temporary insanity brought about by protracted drinking, and had admitted frankly to the jury that he had no recollection whatever of the shooting or of the events of two days preceding it. Witnesses had testified that he had no acquaintance with the innocent person whom he had killed, and hence could not have had any malice against him. He appeared, at the moment of the killing, to think the stranger was threatening him or was about to threaten him.

Twenty-seven men had been put upon the witness-stand by the defense to swear that the carpenter's character was good, and that he was not a violent man when he was sober. The district attorney, experienced in gauging Texas juries, which not only determine a prisoner's guilt or innocence but assess the penalties as well, had half expected an acquittal, but the jury had hardened its collective heart, found the murderer guilty—and sentenced him to eighteen months in prison!

The carpenter was very bitter about this miscarriage of justice and talked to Brice about it all the way to Huntsville. They had no right to find him guilty, he said. Hadn't he proven, not only that he was drunk when he did it, but that he wasn't that kind of man? His fulminations, repeated and reiterated, annoyed Brice, who wanted to sit quietly and think.

His thoughts persisted, even above his companion's complaints. He was a felon, on his way to State prison. How long before Mrs. Dassler would deem the time had come to speak? How long?

He understood bookkeeping, and they put him into the accounting department, where he worked under a gray-haired expert bookkeeper who had wrecked a bank. He thought he would have to serve perhaps three months. At the end of that time he expected daily to hear that the governor had taken action in his behalf. In four months, hope became worry. In six it became fear. In eight, despair. At the end of a year he knew the woman was not going to speak, or if she had spoken, that her speech had been futile.

AFTER two years and six months, by virtue of time off for good behavior, they gave Brice his civilian clothes, his four dollars and ninety-five cents and his freedom. He had no desire to see San Antonio again, and he headed northward. When, by several easy stages, he reached St. Louis, he did not look the ex-convict, and he did not have to pass through the humiliating experiences with the police that are

so often the lot of discharged prisoners. For one thing, he did not have the prison walk. His military training had persevered to keep him erect and make his footsteps even.

He called himself William T. Brown. It was as good a name as any, under which to bury two identities. He worked at bookkeeping and accounting. Ultimately he heard of a little business college in a Wisconsin town that wanted an instructor, and by virtue of many things he had learned from the gray-haired, bank-wrecking expert and of references he had gained during his two years in St. Louis, he secured it. The pay was not great, but neither were the expenses of life in the town high. He strove to forget, seeing there was nothing else he could do. Garnet Brice was dead. So, God willing, was *alias* John Martin, convict. He was thirty-five years old; he still had much of his life to live; and he determined to live it bravely and inconspicuously, and to make for himself a good reputation in his new home.

When he had been there a little more than a year, something happened to upset his calculations. The emperor of Germany, as a desperate climax to the world-adventure upon which he had so blithely embarked in 1914, turned loose his U-boats against the neutral commerce of the world and offered to present three American commonwealths to Mexico as a price for aid in the fight against democracy. The mother of democracies, peace-loving and long-suffering, had no honorable choice but to pick up the gage.

WILLIAM T. BROWN, in his Wisconsin home, fought a battle with himself. When it had been fought and won, he took a train for Washington. It was not easy to gain access to General Eldridge in such busy days, but he did it; and he succeeded in getting the interview without the presence of any third person.

The General glanced casually at him and back at the card in his hand.

"Will you please state your business as quickly as possible, Mr. Brown?" he said brusquely. "It is important, you said, and something the Government—my department, at least—ought to know."

"I had to say that, General, to get a hearing," the visitor replied quietly. "Do you recall a first lieutenant formerly in your regiment—named Garnet Brice?"

At the sound of the man's voice, the General looked up sharply, with the thought that it was familiar. At the name he came to his feet.

"Brice!" he exclaimed. "In God's name, man, where did you come from? Where have you been? You've changed—with that beard, and wrinkles around your eyes. But now that I look at you I wonder I didn't know you at once. What happened? You've been—"

"I've been dead, General—dead to the world, at least—dead to my friends. I've got to remain dead, so far as my name goes. If it hadn't been for the war, you would never have heard from me again. But— When I left the army post, that evening, I—I was arrested. I served thirty months in the State prison."

"Arrested! State prison! What had you done?"

"Nothing—nothing either criminal or wrong." Brice's voice broke a little as he spoke of it, the first time he had ever done so. "But I had to choose. I had to choose between that and a woman's reputation. I give you my word as an officer, sir, that there was nothing wrong in our relationship, but— I'd like to tell you the story, if you will listen. I've come a good many miles just to do that. I can't mention the woman's name, even now, of course, but—"

"My boy! Of course I'll listen. Sit down. Begin at the beginning. You left the post that night—"

BRICE told the story as briefly as he could, and simply. Save only that he did not name the woman, he told it all.

"And I went to Huntsville," he concluded. "And I served my sentence, to the end—two years and six months. She never spoke the word. Perhaps she tried and couldn't. I don't know. I suppose I never shall know. I hope I shall never see her again. I paid the

price of her foolishness, and my own. When I got out, it was all over with Garnet Brice, of course; so I started in again. I haven't done badly, sir. I'm an instructor in a business college up in my little town, and I think, for a comparative newcomer, I'm a fairly well-known and respected citizen. I was going to stay there, but you see, this war puts a different complexion on things. I can't.

"The Government, sir, spent a lot of money educating me at the Point to be an officer—and the Government needs officers and needs them badly. And it is my government. It is entitled to my services. I couldn't in honor withhold them.

"I thought at first I would just enlist, but that isn't fair to the country. Enlisted men are needed badly enough, Heaven knows, but trained officers are wanted much more. So I have come to you. Garnet Brice is dead and buried, years ago. But I want you to help me think of a way by which William T. Brown, of Wisconsin, can find some place in this new establishment that will give him an opportunity to use the military knowledge he happens to possess. You can fix it some way, sir, and nobody will ever be the wiser."

"Has it occurred to you," General Eldridge said after a moment, "that, sooner or later, some of your old army friends are pretty sure to see you and recognize you?"

"Can't we find a post—in the new service—where I'm not likely to run into them?"

"You know we can't. See here, Brice. You're going at this thing all wrong. You've thought of it from one angle so long that your perspective is all twisted. Fate has placed you in a position where you have to practice deceit about your past all the time, anyway; can't you see that lying about one part of it isn't any worse than about another?"

"I don't think I understand, sir."

GENERAL ELDRIDGE came to his feet and walked up and down the room, and the gruffness in his voice was to conceal emotion.

"When you went downtown that evening in San Antonio, six years ago this month, and somebody hit you on the head with a sandbag, you lost all track of who you were, didn't you? And when you came to yourself, in Wisconsin, under the name of William Brown, you couldn't recollect where you had been or what you had done. You've heard of cases like that; the medical records are full of them. What a mistake it would be to keep on being Brown when you remember, now, that you are Brice!"

"You mean—"

"I mean you were a fool to get mixed into that woman scrape, but that's over with, and you've completely forgotten it, and so have I. I mean I'm going myself to a certain official, within the next hour,—a certain official that isn't a thousand miles removed from the Secretary of War,—and I'm going to tell him a confidential story about a crazy young officer in the United States Army who was so old-fashioned that he'd let the mere matter of a woman's honor ruin him. And when you come back here, about three o'clock this afternoon, we'll see what we'll see."

The General halted his march abruptly, and held out his hand.

"It isn't likely we can get all your numbers back," he said, "but you'll go in as a captain, or I'll find out why. Now get out of here! Burn up those calling-cards. Shave off those whiskers. Come back at three o'clock as Garnet Brice. He was an awful fool, that boy, but he is too good a man to be dead."

"THE OAKDALE AFFAIR"

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS, author of the famous *Tarzan* stories, has written for THE BLUE BOOK a novelette which at least equals anything that popular author has ever written. Watch for "The Oakdale Affair;" it will be published complete in the next—the March—issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale February 1st.

Don Quixote McGraw

by Albert Payson Terhune

ONE of his ancestors had been a crusader. One had been a civic-reform leader. One had been the original man-who-shared-his-last-crust-with-a-friend. One had been Sir Galahad. One had been Chevalier Bayard. And at least ten of them had been Don Quixote.

This family-tree of Con McGraw's is drawn wholly from deduction. But it is as undoubtedly accurate as is the skilled botanist's deductions as to a flower's ancestry, or as is the scientist's throw-back of the modern horse to the Eohippus of prehistoric days.

Con's family-tree could have been traced back, without any trouble at all, to every one of the illustrious personages I have named—except for one trifling obstacle: his father, Patrick Sarsfield McGraw, began life in a Dublin foundling asylum and with no idea at all who his own parents had been.

Hence the need of deduction, rather than positive proof, in sketching Con's family-tree. But no one who knew Con McGraw could doubt for a moment that all these mighty forbears had gone to make up the sum of his character—especially Don Quixote. Con was ninety per cent Don Quixote.

Con's emigrant father had gone to work, at the age of ten, as tally-boy in the yards of the Daniel T. Greene Smelting Company. At fifty he was superintendent of the works—a self-made man who reverently glorified his maker.

Con himself had been sent to high school and then to business college, and had not entered the Daniel T. Greene works until he was eighteen. Then, he was sent in "to learn the business from the bottom up."

Daniel T. Greene, the big boss and the employer of three thousand men, was Coketown's foremost citizen. A discharged bookkeeper had once spoken of "Dan'l"—thus he wrote his first name—as "a granite shaft topped by a steel trap," which of course was a cruel thing to say, and did not at all do justice to that great and good man. But it came closer to describing him than can any words of mine. So, for lack of a better one, we will let the description go as it stands.

GREENE had but two real weaknesses in his granite make-up: One was the great smelting company he had created out of nothing. The other was his only son, Rolf. There had been a third and supreme weakness—a blue-eyed, sunny-haired Weakness, too soft and fragile for a rough world like Daniel's. She had died in bringing

Rolf into life. And, with her—so far as women were concerned—Greene's heart had also died.

Rolf was brought up as a rich man's son, his father pathetically trying to give the boy all the luxuries and good times he himself had had to go without in his own bleak boyhood. As a result the lad was abominably spoiled. And he came home to Coketown, somewhat suddenly, in the middle of his sophomore year at Yale, accompanied by an urgent written request from the dean that he honor the university no longer with his presence.

The disgrace of Rolf's expulsion from Yale smote Dan'l squarely between the gimlet-eyes. He had so counted on his son's acquiring a college education. He had so blatantly bragged to his friends about Rolf's future! And now—

A tempest of unchecked fury swept the Greene home that day, blanching the disgraced boy's face by its blast and well-nigh throwing Dan'l himself into apoplexy. The upshot of it was that Greene refused to send the boy to another college, and curtly drove him into the smelting-works, where—like Con McGraw—he was bidden to "learn the business from the bottom up."

Daniel T. Greene had a profound respect for his superintendent, Patrick Sarsfield McGraw. He admired the style in which the self-made foundling had hammered and wriggled his way upward to the superintendency. He valued the man's services; he even made more or less an intimate of him.

DANIEL liked young Con. There was an honesty, an aggressive Irish pluck, an unselfishness, a snap-and-go to the lad that pleased Greene. He also liked the way Con took hold of his new job.

Over a pipe in the sacred inner office, Daniel prophesied a big future for the boy—to the outward indifference and secret rapture of the old superintendent to whom he made the prophecy. He frankly bemoaned his own son's seeming worthlessness and made a loud moan that he and old McGraw could not swap sons.

"I'd give you half my bank-roll to boot," declared Daniel. "And I'd still be the winner, at that."

"You're a bit tough on young Mr. Rolf, sir," protested the superintendent. "There's no harm to him, beyond a kick of his father's own spirit. You've took yours out in work. He's took his out in mischief. That's the only difference. He's a colt, yet. But he's got the punch. Mark my words, he'll do well, and he'll make you proud of him yet. He's buckling down grand to his work—so his foreman tells me. Don't you be disheartened about him, Mr. Greene. He's all right."

Thereby, with not too great a massacre of truth, did Patrick Sarsfield McGraw seek to repay the compliments his demigod had just been showering on his adored Con.

The two young fellows had gone to grammar school together as children. There they had formed a warm friendship which the separation of twelve years had broken off. Now, meeting again every day in the shops, the old-time friendship was renewed.

Rolf, from the first, liked the ardent, unselfish visionary young Irishman. And Con gradually lifted Rolf to the highest pedestal of worship in his soul. In work and in play, the two workmen became inseparable. Dan'l smiled approvingly on the odd comradeship. As a rule, he disliked Rolf's intimates. But he hoped much from Con's example and influence on the wayward lad. As for old McGraw, he rejoiced as exultantly in the youths' friendship as though his boy had been chosen as a comrade-at-arms by Robert Emmet.

When eighty dollars' worth of half-tempered metal was spoiled through Rolf's carelessness and Con took the blame, old Patrick Sarsfield jubilantly patted his son on the back and vowed to get him a raise of pay. When Rolf, learning of the sacrifice, went straight to his father with the truth, Greene chuckled raspily—and then promoted both friends into a higher shop.

AND so it went on—for a matter of five years.

At the end of that time, Rolf was sent out for his initial trip on the road. And Con was assigned to a

desk in the sacred inner office. It was the chums' first parting since their entrance into the shops. Up to this point, they had traveled upward, side by side.

Both felt keenly the separation. But Rolf was to spend only six months on road-work; and then Con was to go out on the same traveling job for another six, while Rolf took his friend's vacated desk. After which, the two were to work in the same office until such time as Rolf should go into the firm. So they had a reunion to look forward to.

Rolf did more than fairly well on the road. And Daniel used to listen with an approving grin to old McGraw's praise of the heir's knack at securing orders.

Then came the smash.

One morning, Con was bent busily over his desk. The elder McGraw stood beside him, waiting for Greene to finish reading his mail, before making a report on some new-bought machinery. Daniel himself was glancing over a pile of personal letters with the speed and thoroughness of a conjurer manipulating a card-deck.

His steel-trap face softened as he came upon an envelope in Rolf's loose handwriting. Daniel slackened speed, tore open the envelope and proceeded to grant himself five minutes of leisure wherein to master his beloved son's epistle.

But in much less than five minutes the pleased grin was wiped by magic from his face. His thin lips flew apart in a snarl so ferocious as to bring both the McGraws to his side at a bound.

"What's hit you, boss?" demanded the superintendent in great concern.

Con said nothing. He recognized Rolf's handwriting on the sheet of paper his employer was gripping so fiercely in one big fist. And his own face whitened a bit under its florid color. For a moment Daniel did not answer, but sat glaring in baleful horror at the clenched letter in his hand. Then the flood-gates of speech were flung open.

"THE whelp!" he bellowed. "The thankless, worthless, contemptible swine! The—"

"Hold on there, Mr. Greene!" begged Con as the superintendent still blinked in perplexity at his employer's outburst. "It's your own son you're talking about. And he doesn't deserve a single one of those rotten names. He—"

"Shut up, you!" roared Daniel, purple and writhing. "What do *you* know about it? He's—"

"He's my friend!" retorted Con. "And I wont stand—"

"Shut up, Con!" exhorted the superintendent, shocked at such defiance to the big boss. "Shut up. Don't you hear Mr. Greene telling you to? Be still! What's wrong, Mr. Greene?" he went on, respectfully turning to the sputtering Daniel. "Or maybe is it none of our business?"

"It's anybody's business!" raved Greene. "It's everybody's business. It'll be in all the papers, I suppose. The cur! He's dragged my name in the mud again. The—"

"He—he hasn't got himself locked up, has he, sir?" quavered old McGraw, with all an Irishman's inborn dread of jail.

"He's got himself locked up—for life!" cried Daniel. "That's just what he's done. During this last trip to New York—he's writing from there, now, when he ought to have been on his way to Pittsburgh—during this New York trip, he—he has been married!"

He glared from one of his two hearers to the other, to note their wild distress at the tidings. But as both of them looked merely interested, he remembered he had not told them the crux of the catastrophe.

"He's married an *actress!*" went on the raging Daniel. "An *actress,* d'you hear? A kind of woman who dances in tights, I suppose, and sells herself to—"

"He has not!" flashed Con.

"YOU fool!" snarled Daniel. "Here's his own letter that says so. Not that I blame you for not being able to believe—"

"He *has* not!" declared Con hotly. "Married, he may be. And it's no disgrace to be married. It's nothing worse than a misfortune, at most. And he

may be married to an actress too. I'm told there's scores of them that are as clean and as straight as a man's own mother. And I'll stake ten years' pay she's one of those. Rolf's never married the kind of woman you say. His wife's as good a woman as any—"

"Either shut up or else get out of here!" ordered Daniel. "It's black disgrace enough for me to have such a son, without you taking his part. Here I've toiled and sweated and schemed all my life to build up this business, so I could leave a great enterprise for my only boy to carry on, along with my name. And what has he done? He's smashed every plan and every hope and every dream I had. By marrying a dirty—"

"Steady, there!" cut in Con, white-mad.

Daniel glowered on the younger man as if he would have sprung at his throat. But, at the glow in Con's eyes and the hard set of his mouth, Greene swallowed hard and then slightly shifted his own invective's course.

"He's married an actress," he went on, "—a woman I can't receive as a daughter-in-law—a woman I can't ask his dead mother's friends to welcome—a woman who'll teach him that a man's main object in life is to give her all the money she can squander. She'd wring the company's treasury dry and empty his private bank-account, too, if he had any left. And when he had no more money to give him, she'd flit off to some one who had."

"Mr. Greene! I—"

"BUT she wont get the chance!" Daniel shouted, thundering on his desk-lid with his fist and flying into a new paroxysm of blind rage. "She wont get the chance! Oh, I know her sort! And I know her game. They read the papers—her kind of woman. And they study Bradstreet's too. She knows to a dollar what I'm worth. And she knows Rolf is the only child I've got. She thinks she's lighted on her feet in a United States mint. Well, she hasn't. She's overplayed her hand. That's what she's done. She's—"

"There, there, now, Mr. Greene!" soothed the superintendent. "You'll be falling sick if you let yourself get so het up. At your age too, it's dangerous, sir. It's—"

"You'll let my age alone!" fiercely ordered Daniel. "I'm not too old to teach that cub and his chorus-girl wife that it's safer to fool with a rattlesnake than with Dan'l T. Greene. The noon mail to-day is going to take a letter from me to my loving son. He begs me, here, to write to him, at once. Well, I'm going to. I'm going to tell him I can't annul his marriage, because he's of age and has a legal right to commit career-suicide. But I'm going to tell him I'm done with him. I'm going to—"

"Mr. Greene! Boss!" gasped the superintendent. "You'd never do such a heartless thing! Your only—"

"Did he stop to remember I was his father and that he was wrecking my life as well as his own?" growlingly demanded Daniel. "Did he? No! Well, turn about is fair play. He's married. Let him support his wife. And if she kicks him out when she finds I wont surrender, so much the better for him! In either case, I'm done with him for good and all. Not one dollar more of my money shall he ever see. Not one bite of my food shall he eat, if he's dying of starvation. My house is as tight closed to him as it would be to any other tramp. Let him and his—"

"Mr. Greene," interposed Con very quietly, while his father stood aghast at the melodramatic outburst, "Mr. Greene, for your own sake, quit talking like an idiot."

"WHAT'S that?" snapped Daniel, not believing his own large and faithful ears.

"I say, stop it, for your own sake," replied Con. "Angry words are easy enough to spit out. But they're bitter hard to swallow again. And the less you speak along the line you've just been speaking, the less you'll have to swallow, when you come back to your senses. I'm advising it, because I owe you a lot; and because, next to my father, you're the finest man I know, and because I've no right to let you go ahead like that, unwarned, to say nothing of my being Rolf's friend, too."

"Con!" reproved his father, again all but tongue-tied at his offspring's boss-blasphemy. "Mr. Greene, don't you mind what he says. He's young, yet, and he has a queer pig-headed strain to him that's forever making him get into trouble for the under-dog. Overlook it, wont you, sir? He'll be sorry. He means no harm. You heard him say, himself, how he looks up to you."

The father paused in his plea. His quick Irish eyes, studying Greene's wrathful face, told him Daniel was not wholly displeased by Con's impertinence. There was a fighting spirit in Daniel that ever doffed its hat in respect to a fellow-fighter. He knew Con had spoken with the realization that he might be discharged for what he was saying. Yet, fearlessly, the boy had defied the boss who held life-and-death control of his financial destiny.

"Con," said Daniel presently, after swallowing hard once or twice, "if I've said it a single time, I've said it fifty times: I'd give half my pile if you'd been my son, instead of Rolf."

"Then you'd be half a fortune out of pocket!" declared Con.

"I've said it less, of late years," went on Daniel, unheeding, "because I've been donkey enough to think Rolf was beginning to amount to something. But now I've washed my hands of him."

"MR. GREENE, now!" clucked the superintendent, trying to look pained and succeeding very badly. "Mr. Greene, you can't really mean—"

"I mean just what I've said," insisted Daniel. "And I'll prove it. On Rolf's birthday next month, I was going to bring him into the firm, on a one-third partnership basis, and with the job of secretary. I didn't tell him so, because, like the wall-eyed galoot I was, I wanted to surprise him. Well, it's *he* that's done the surprising. But in spite of that, the arrangements for the partnership are all made. And I'm going to replace a worthless son with a worth-while one. Con, I'm going to fill in your name, instead of Rolf's, to the partnership papers."

"Glory be!"

"You *are* not!"

Father and son spoke in one breath.

"You *are* not!" repeated Con, in no wise impressed by the offer or by his father's tearful bliss thereat. "You're going to do nothing of the sort."

Daniel grunted, as though some one had butted him in the stomach. Patrick Sarsfield McGraw moaned aloud, in grief at his son's insanity.

"Mr. Greene," resumed Con, "you very well know you'd never think of giving me a third interest in your business, on my own merits. I'm a good man in my place. And I hope, in time, to be a better man in a better place. But on a business basis, you'd never in a thousand years make me a partner in your firm. And you know you wouldn't. And you're not the breed of man to do it out of personal fondness for me, either. If you were as soft as all that, you'd never be where you are to-day."

"Con!" bleated the superintendent, in great misery. "*Con,* lad!"

"You're using me as a club to beat Rolf to a pulp," went on Con. "You want to be able to say to him: 'Not only you're no son of mine, but I've put another son in your place. I've given your heritage to an outsider, to punish you for going against my wishes.' That's what you want to say to Rolf, Mr. Greene. And that's why you're making me this crazy offer. Which same offer, I beg leave to decline without thanks. Rolf's my best friend. I'm not going to let myself be used as a torture-instrument for him. That's final."

DANIEL GREENE'S face went purpler than ever. His mouth opened to let out a torrent of vituperation upon the ingrate. Then all at once he choked back the unsaid words, and his teeth closed with a click.

"I wish, all the more, you were my boy, Con," he said almost gently. "You're a good deal of a man—if something more of a fool. I'm going home now. I'm going to treat myself to a holiday. If I don't feel more like work, to-morrow, I may run out to the lake for a few days' fishing. Good-by."

He stamped out, his hat over his eyes, leaving the McGraws staring after him in amaze. In the memory of neither of them had Daniel T. Greene

ever absented himself from work, except on short, specific yearly vacations.

To the elder McGraw came a second shock before he could collect his scattered faculties to the point of speech.

"Having just turned down a chance to make a rich man of myself," airily observed Con, rising and stretching, "I think I'll celebrate by treating myself to a holiday, too. Good-by, Dad."

"By all the saints in glory!" sputtered Patrick Sarsfield McGraw.

But Con was gone. And the office-door shut noisily behind him. In his pocket was the letter from Rolf, which Daniel had flung to the floor during his tirade.

NOW Con McGraw had not worked in the employ of Daniel T. Greene without gaining a fairly accurate knowledge of that sweet-souled magnate's nature. Even as a boxer has a tolerable idea of the next move that will be made by the man who has for years been his sparring-partner, so in this crisis, Con was able to guess at Daniel's most likely course.

The guess was confirmed soon after he had packed a bag and reached the Coketown railroad station. From behind the waiting-room's grimy window, Con beheld Daniel emerge from a taxicab, suit-case in hand, and buy a ticket.

When the noon train pulled out for New York, Daniel occupied a Pullman seat in it, while Con, unseen by his employer, boarded the smoker, far in front.

At four o'clock that afternoon Daniel emerged from the Pennsylvania Station and made his way toward the taxicabs. Con, having studied the uptown address on Rolf's letter, decided he could get to his destination more quickly by the subway—which, perhaps, he might have done, but for a twenty-minute "block" in that temperamental artery of traffic.

Fuming at the costly delay, Con came to the surface of the earth forty-five minutes later on far northern Broadway. He ran, rather than walked, the block and a half that separated him from the address he sought.

He was in a sweat of worry. Daniel had had time enough to burst in upon the two luckless honeymooners and to say and do things that neither of them could ever forget or forgive.

It was to stand between the newly-weds and this assault that Con had risked his own job and his future by running away from work in the busiest season of the whole year. And his sacrifice had gone for nothing.

He had acted on his usual Don Quixote impulse in coming to New York. He had not been clear in his own mind as to what his presence could do in straightening out the snarl. But he was Rolf's friend. Rolf was in dire trouble. And if ever the disgraced youth needed a friend at his side, this was the time.

Therefore, Con had hurried, head-on, to his chum. His only definite plan had been to get to Rolf's flat soon enough to act as a buffer against the old man's first attack. Beyond that, he had trusted to circumstance to show him a way to help.

And now, Daniel must have had a full fifteen-minute start on him. It would probably be too late to undo the harm the father had done. Nevertheless, Con hurried on, all the faster.

THE flat-building he came to presently, and whose number he verified, was the five-story, forty- to sixty-dollar-per-month type that boasts no elevator and whose tenants' names are posted on cards at the top of the double line of mail-boxes in the vestibule.

Con scanned the ten name-slips and found the name he wanted. Not being at all familiar with the push-button etiquette of flat-houses,—which are still a rarity in Coketown,—he looked around for the front doorbell. Failing to find it at once, he gave a tentative turn at the door-handle. The last entrant had left the door on the latch. It opened under Con's pressure. He entered and started upstairs, stopping to read each door-card on the way. Presently he found what he sought.

Pinned to the right-hand fourth-floor portal was a woman's card. On it was engraved: *"Miss Gloria Wesson."* The engraved name had been crossed out, with a pencil, and beneath it had been scribbled: *"Mr. and Mrs. Rolf Venable Greene."*

Con's romantic Irish imagination conjured up the glee of bride and groom as they had thus proclaimed to all possible callers the fact that Gloria was no longer Miss Wesson, and that she and her new-wed husband now occupied her former bachelor-girl flat.

And his fists clenched at thought of Daniel's happiness-smashing intrusion on their bower. He strained his ears for sounds of strife from within. But the unaccustomed noise of the city had dulled his hearing.

Con rang the bell. A woman opened the door.

She was small—almost like a child in her dainty littleness of body. Her black hair fluffed all over her head. Her face was very tiny, and her eyes were very big—very big and very dark.

At one keen look into their childlike depths, Con knew he had been right in giving Daniel the lie when the raging father had sought to rip Gloria's character to shreds.

A glance at the firmly square little jaw, which contrasted so sharply with the softness of her flower face, told him she would not cower meekly under the blast of Daniel's wrath. It was the jaw of a fighter. And Con, being a fighter, recognized it as such, and did homage to it.

He felt much relieved thereat. He had feared to witness the crushing of a butterfly. But here was no butterfly. Rather, a honeybee—sweet, pretty, useful, friendly and harmless when not attacked, yet equipped with a very serviceable sting.

CON breathed easier. From the wholly unruffled aspect of the girl, he saw that no battle had been raging. And he asked, in wonder:

"Hasn't he got here yet?"

They were his first words to his chum's bride. He blurted them as might an excited schoolboy. Gloria's white brow puckered in surprise at the greeting. Before she could speak, he added:

"Mr. Greene, I'm talking about. He hasn't come here yet? I thought sure he must—"

"No," answered Gloria, in a voice with unwontedly sweet and well-trained modulations, "Mr. Greene has not come home yet. He did not expect to get back from business until—"

"Oh, it isn't Rolf I'm asking about," interrupted Con. "It's his father, Daniel T. Greene. He was on his way here—at least, I take it he was on his way here—the same time I started. And I got detained a thundering long time by a wagon or something falling apart on the track, in your underground road. I was sure he'd beaten me here."

"Mr. Daniel T. Greene?" repeated the girl, smiling expectantly. "Oh, you mean my husband's father? He is coming to see us? I'm so glad."

"The pleasure is all yours," muttered poor Con. "Don't count too much on it. And do you mind if I make free to introduce myself? My name is Cornelius McGraw. I'm a friend—"

"You're Con McGraw?" cried Gloria, the smile this time illuminating her whole little face, as she impulsively thrust forward both hands in greeting. "Oh, come in, please! It's so good to see you! Rolf says you're his very dearest friend. He's told me ever so much about you. Come in."

As she talked, she led the way into the flat and on into its pretty living-room.

"Rolf ought to be back in half an hour or so," she said, as Con awkwardly followed her into the room. "It will be splendid for him to find you here. And you say his father is coming too? What a wonderful reunion! We'll all celebrate by going somewhere to dinner. I'm afraid to risk my own poor cooking for such an event."

Con felt a lump in his heart. The girl was unfeignedly delighted at the prospect of entertaining her bridegroom's chum and her bridegroom's father. Her face was flushed and her eyes were shining with the pleasure of the anticipation.

AND Daniel was due to arrive at any moment! Daniel, who had come all the way to New York to cast off his son and to insult his son's wife, in person—because he could do it so much more effectively and satisfactorily that way than by letter.

Con drew a long, long breath and

braced himself to the task of preparing this happy bride for the cruel shock in store for her.

"Has—has Rolf told you much about his father?" he began timidly.

"Only that he owns some sort of a factory in Pennsylvania," replied Gloria, as if surprised at the queer question. "You know Dan is here on business for the factory now. That's why he had to be downtown so long to-day."

"At the New York branch-office," said Con. "I know. And he's told you nothing more about the boss—about Mr. Greene?"

"No," she said, after a moment's consideration, "nothing in particular. You see, we haven't known each other so very long, Rolf and I—not much more than two months in all. I met him, through the Bemises, on his first business trip here. And we have had so many things to say to each other that we haven't talked much about our families. But," she added with a return of that same glad smile, "he's talked to me, no end, about *you*."

"You were married last week, weren't you?" asked Con.

"Four days ago. Yes," she said, "Rolf wanted to wait till he went home, before he told his father about it. He wanted to take me along, as a surprise. But yesterday I persuaded him to write to Mr. Greene. Rolf's father couldn't have gotten the letter until this morning. Isn't it dear of such a busy man to come on here, so soon, to welcome me into the family?"

Con groaned. Gloria, in surprise at the sound and at the visitor's look of utter despondence, jumped to her feet.

"WHY, what is the matter?" she asked.

"Everything's the matter, Mrs. Greene," he made answer, in a spurt of desperate courage. "I'd like to break it to you by degrees. But I haven't time. He's li'ble to be here any minute now. I take it he went straight to the branch-office, to lay out Rolf, before doing the same for you. That must be why I'm here first. Listen to me, please."

"What is it?" she demanded, puzzled and distressed by his manner. "Are you trying to break the news to me that something has happened to Rolf?"

"Something is due to," he responded gloomily. "Here's the idea: Mr. Daniel T. Greene is one of the Lord's own fine men—in his own way. But he's got a will of his own—a will that'd make a pile-driver look like a toothpick. And Rolf's crossed that pile-driver will of his by marrying you. The boss isn't coming here for a love-feast. He's coming to make war-medicine."

"I don't understand. Why should—"

"No," said Con. "And Rolf didn't tell you. I suppose he thought no one could see you without being tickled to death to have you for a daughter-in-law. And no one could, except Daniel T. Greene. Rolf saw how lovely you are. And it made him forget how—how funny his father is, about things—some things. Otherwise, he'd never have written the way he did."

"Will you please try to make it clearer?" asked Gloria, her soft eyes hardening a bit and her jaw taking on a squarer look. "Do you mean Mr. Greene is angry because Rolf has married me?"

"I mean just that," answered Con. "I'm sorry, but—"

"But why should he be?" she inquired in genuine bewilderment. "Rolf is making a living—a good living. He can support a wife. And even if his father's factory should fail and put him out of work for a time, I can always tide him along by going back to the stage until he gets on his feet again. I am not a fortune-maker as an actress. But I've had steady work ever since I left the convent school. And almost any manager on Broadway will pay me seventy dollars a week for ingénue rôles—sometimes a good deal more. So we wont starve. I—"

"It isn't that," expostulated Con, twisting in his chair. "It's hard to explain. You see, he—"

THE pur of the buzzer broke in on his floundering speech.

"Ten to nothing that's the boss now!" he said miserably, as Gloria went to answer the summons.

"Miss Gloria Wesson?" boomed a

rough voice at the threshold—a voice with a note in it like an angry bull's.

"Mrs. Greene," corrected Gloria. "Are you Mr.—"

Daniel pushed past her into the flat, before the question was finished.

"I've come here to take up ten minutes of your time," he growled. "You'd better spare me that much of it. For it's the last claim I'll make on your time—or on Rolf's, either. I went to the office to see him. But he was out somewhere. So I came here. Is he—"

"Rolf will be back in a little while, Mr. Greene," returned Gloria. And Con could tell she was making a mighty effort not to resent Daniel's bullying tone. "He—"

"Then I'll wait for him," grunted Daniel. "And, meantime, I've something to say to you, too, madam—whether you want to hear it or not. I— Where the devil did you come from?" he broke off, with a bellow, entering the living-room and seeing Con.

"From Coketown, sir," said Con quietly, "on the noon train—same as yourself. I—"

"Get out of here!" commanded the irate Daniel. "I want to talk privately to this woman. We can settle about your deserting the office later. Get out!"

"I *will* not," stolidly replied Con.

"Perhaps it would be better, Mr. McGraw," suggested Gloria, "if only for my sake, it—"

"It's for your sake I'm staying," Con retorted, "—till Rolf gets here, anyhow. If I have to go earlier, it'll be with Mr. Daniel T. Greene on my back. No offense to either of you, but here I'll stay."

DANIEL snorted loudly, glared at the imperturbable Con, then decided to ignore his presence and save all his own wrath for its legitimate object—for this actress-woman his son had married.

"I can say what I've got to say to you in few words," Daniel started in, turning on Gloria. "And what I say is final. You can save your acting for those it will impress. Don't waste any tragedy or pathos on me. It wont serve. I'm a rich man. You know that. That's why you married my son. I'm here to tell you you can keep him, for all of me. I'm through with him. But not one more cent of my money shall he touch, now or hereafter. And, to-morrow his name goes off the company's pay-roll at the same time it goes out of my will. Understand that? It's an ultimatum. And now that I've said it, you can repeat it to Rolf. On second thought, there's no use in my waiting to see him. I've no further interest in him. And I want to go back home. Good day."

He turned, doorward.

"Is that your last word, Mr. Greene?" asked Con, unobtrusively stepping between Daniel and the door. "Because, if it is, it seems to me I'll be doing this lady and my chum a fine big service by dropping you out of the window. You'll drift to the sidewalk in no condition at all to change your will, or to fire Rolf from off the pay-roll, either. Yes," he continued reflectively, "there are worse plans than that."

With no emotion at all, he strode meditatively up to Daniel. Had he sprung at his employer or shown a sign of anger, Daniel's fighting spirit would have flared up at such a challenge.

But at the businesslike voice, the calm face, the unhurried approach, Daniel felt a queer tingling along his spine and his hair-roots. In his own haze of anger, it seemed to him quite possible that the quixotic Irishman would actually carry out his crazy purpose to save his friend's future.

The belligerent old magnate recoiled a step—even before Gloria flung herself between the two men.

"Mr. McGraw!" gasped the girl in horror. *"Mr. McGraw!"*

"Then I'll give him one chance," carelessly agreed Con. "Mr. Greene, you'll not start for that door—not unless you want to go out by the window, instead. You'll sit down and talk with this young lady. And you'll talk with her, as easy and civil as the Lord will give you grace to. If you forget she's a lady and your son's wife, why, the window's still there. Now, miss, just forget to be scared about me. Sit down and talk with him, like I wasn't here at

all. Forget I'm anything but a safety-clutch. And keep on remembering that this is your one big chance with him. Talk up now, both of you."

HE strolled to the hallway door and became absorbed in the contemplation of a picture hanging there. Daniel glared from Con's back to Gloria's flushed face. He sat down glumly.

"I've nothing more to say to you," he told her in sulky ill temper. "But if I'm to sit here till Rolf comes back, I have no great objection. Don't let me keep you here if you are busy."

Gloria hesitated; then she sat down opposite him.

"If you don't care to talk to me," she said very coolly, "perhaps you will listen while I speak to you. You need not be afraid of my 'acting.' I am not given to do that except for a living. And even if I were, I see no reason why I should waste my talents on a man who has just insulted me in my own home, and from whom I have nothing to gain or lose."

"Nothing to gain or lose?" echoed Daniel, crankily forgetting his resolve of silence.

"What have I to gain or lose from any man, except my husband?" she asked, still politely, yet with her jaw ever squarer and squarer. "What good or harm can you or anyone else do me? I am sorry you don't like me, of course, but only because it will make Rolf sorry. For I suppose he is fond of you, though I confess I can't see why, if this is the way you always behave. He will be sorry to lose your good will. He may even be sorry to lose his position—though a man of his cleverness can always get another. And I can keep the home going till he does. So what do we lose that is worth 'acting' about? Why should I be silly enough to try to wheedle you into liking me or forgiving Rolf? I don't care whether you like me or not. And if you are casting Rolf off, for no worse sin than for marrying a girl he loves, your forgiveness is not worth having."

Her tone was quiet, even pleasant. She showed no excitement. Yet her every word was incisive. Daniel stared. His armor of aloofness began to crack.

"WHAT have you to gain or lose, eh?" he blustered, stung at her indifference. "You have the fortune and the business of Daniel T. Greene to lose, young woman. Doesn't that seem anything? Doesn't—"

"I don't know whether it's anything or not," she answered simply. "All I know about you is that you run a factory out in Coketown. I don't know whether Coketown is a village or a metropolis. I don't know whether your factory is worth ten dollars a week to you or ten millions. And I don't care. Whatever it is worth, it is not worth our cringing for. Nothing is."

"I fancy you know pretty near to the dollar what my works are worth," said Daniel craftily. "I guess you took a glance through Bradstreet's before—"

A hunching motion of Con's wide shoulders checked him. Gloria replied: "Bradstreet's is a mercantile agency, isn't it? I've heard about it. But as for looking you up in it, Mr. Greene, why, if you'll pardon me for saying so, you are talking nonsense. You may or may not be prominent in Coketown. But, in New York, not one person in a thousand has ever heard of Coketown—to say nothing of hearing of *you*. If I had been angling for a rich man's son, I should not have bothered to look so far afield. There are plenty of them in Manhattan. And if I had married Rolf because his father was rich, I should not now ask Mr. McGraw—as I do—to move aside and let my husband's rich father walk unmolested out of my flat, with no request that he trouble himself to walk into it again. That is all, Mr. Greene."

She rose and, with a curt little nod of dismissal, signified the talk was ended. Daniel rose too. But he did not move to go. Nor was it Con McGraw's presence that held him there blinking dazedly at the tiny woman who was ordering him out of her home.

In all his sixty years Daniel T. Greene had never before been spoken to as his son's wife had just spoken. Others—a very few others, Con among them—had defied him. But they had done it with full knowledge of his power to blast them.

Whereas, this slip of a girl was so

wholly unimpressed by his power that she did not even take it into consideration. She simply ignored it. His greatness and the town he had made great—these evidently meant less than nothing to her. She had treated him—him, the all-powerful Daniel T. Greene—as she might have treated any boorishly domineering stranger who had invaded her flat. Any courtesy she had shown him had plainly been due to the fact that he happened to be her husband's father—not because he was Daniel T. Greene.

"WHEN I first told her you were coming," volunteered Con, moving inside his post at the doorway, "she was as pleased as a kid with a Christmas tree. She was prepared to like you fine, boss. Take my word for that. What's come to you, you've brought on yourself. You've thrown away one corking nice daughter-in-law. She don't care now whether you forgive Rolf or not. And if I know Rolf, he wont care either—not after he hears how you've acted to his wife. The doorway's clear, sir, whenever you want to take her tip and go."

Daniel T. Greene did not answer. He stood, frowning heavily—at nothing. All his life his force and his money had smoothed the way for him. Yet here in this one tiny room were two people who cared for neither of those magic talismans.

This square-jawed, big-eyed girl regarded him as an ill-bred brute, and as nothing more. His son—the son he had ruled with iron hand—would think as she thought. Con McGraw too, who had revered the big boss as a superman—even Con was blind to wealth and ambition when right interposed.

With all his money, all his strength, all his industrial mastery, Daniel T. Greene could not sway these two very ordinary people. He all at once felt weak and old and lonely.

Wealth's only use is over people who want it. Power's one use is over people who fear it. These people whom he had tried to hammer into a shape of his own choosing had not only resisted him, but they had overcome him.

UNWONTED tears—not all of them springing from self-pity—welled up in Daniel's gimlet-eyes. Gloria saw them. She took a quick step toward him, her face suddenly growing wondrous sweet and tender. Not since Rolf's gentle young mother died had a woman troubled to look at Daniel T. Greene like that. It went through his lonely soul like the breath of God.

"I'm sorry!" he babbled, ridiculously like a whipped and penitent child, and speaking through no conscious volition of his own. "I'm sorry! I'm *sorry!*"

Then—also like a scared penitent—he caught hold of Gloria's two outstretched hands.

A latchkey had turned in the flat's door. Rolf Greene came in.

"Dad!" cried Rolf in astonishment.

Daniel T. Greene wheeled about on his son with a ferocious glare that deceived no one.

"I've come here to lug you two worthless, lazy boys back to work!" he shouted. "We start back to-night—the three of us."

"The four of us," meekly amended Con, with a nod toward Gloria.

"The four of us!" Daniel hastily corrected himself. "I *said* 'the four of us.' Anyhow, I *meant* it."

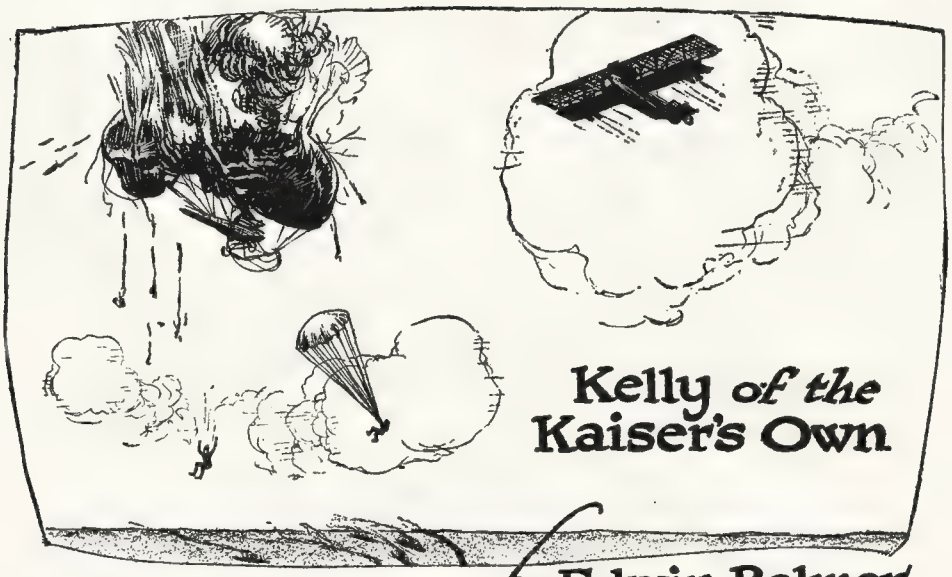
"Con!" exclaimed Rolf, catching sight of his chum for the first time. "What good-better-best wind blew *you* here?"

"Me?" artlessly replied Don Quixote McGraw. "Oh, I just trailed along, to cajole the boss into staying here till you got back from the office and to be the first to tell you he's giving you a partnership as a wedding present. He's a fine man, your father, Rolf—and fonder of you than you know. Why, when he found you weren't here, I had all I could do to keep him from starting right out to hunt for you—by way of the window."

"Con!" rasped Daniel T. Greene. "I'd like nothing better in life than to allow myself the luxury of firing *you*. But"—with a sigh—"I've lived too long without luxuries to begin indulging in them now. So, come on home with—with my family and me."

"Little Mr. Galahad," another of Mr. Terhune's real stories of real people, will be published in our next issue—on sale February 1st.

Stories of the Yankees "Over There"



Kelly of the Kaiser's Own

by Edwin Balmer

"'THE enemy will make the most resolute attack,'" Billy Boal read aloud the order of the day to Cumnor, his mechanic, "'to destroy the American transports now bringing over reinforcements. The German government, having assured its people that no important American forces can reach the Continent and confronted with an ever-increasing number of American divisions, has ordered an extraordinary concentration of its U-boats, which will attack at any cost.

"'Furthermore it has detailed unusual numbers of aircraft, some of which will probably be painted with the colors of the Allies, to act in coöperation with its submarine vessels.

"'You are hereby assigned to patrol-and combat-duty in—'" Boal stopped reading aloud. There was no one else about, but he extended the sheet to Cumnor to let him read to himself the place—"DN22, chart-issue C 17."

Cumnor read and nodded. "I got it."

"'Together with other British and American forces,'" Boal proceeded, "'you will be held responsible for the safe passage of all ships through those waters and most particularly for the preventing of enemy aircraft obtaining information of the course of the convoy.

"'Detailed with you will be the following British and American naval and air forces, to which you will identify yourself upon approach or challenge and who will identify themselves when approached or challenged by you in the below-designated manners—'"

Boal extended the paper again. Cumnor studied the list and whistled.

"Where d'you suppose they got up that bunch of high-signs and passwords, Bill? British Museum?"

"Can you remember 'em?"

"Look here: entirely apart from ourselves, what do you think of trusting our dear Allies' life, liberty and pursuit of Germans to my memory of that mess?"

"Or mine," Billy added.

"Then we'd better keep it as it is."

"It doesn't say anything about destroying it," Boal observed.

"Where's DN22?" Cumnor inquired.

BOAL looked about carefully again before taking out his chart. Ballycon Cove, where the American seaplane lay, was as quiet and deserted as before.

Down at the mouth of the bay, a little Irish fishing-smack, with sails reefed, scurried in from the Atlantic; behind Flight Lieutenant William Boal and his mechanic Gregory Cumnor (real name "Red"), the headlands of the Kerry coast rose rocky and bare. There was something in the manner of a path up the cliff; Red had just come down it, bringing back the sealed order of the day from the town of Strathcone. An old man and girl now were upon this path, but they were still far away.

Billy brought out issue C 17, which was of the Atlantic south and west of Ireland. Delicately ruled lines, distinct from the ordinary cross-lines of latitude and longitude, divided it into numbered and lettered squares. The position and designation of these squares was changed from time to time; the particular arrangement on this chart had been issued only nine days before. Boal and Cumnor made out the position DN22.

"We start at noon?" Cumnor asked.

Boal nodded. "In hour and half. How're the Kerry colleens, Red?"

Cumnor colored; at Princeton, where he had been classed a student,—before the Kaiser sent his little note about maybe allowing us one perpendicularly striped boat a week across the Atlantic, —Red had not been noted for his hatred of girls.

"She's a little bit of all right, I guess!"

"She!" Billy repeated enviously. "Up in town just half an hour, and she's picked out! A dear little disloyal Sinn Feiner?"

"Not she! Two brothers in the Irish Guards, she's knitting things for!"

"Brothers?" Billy questioned. "And only two?"

"Only two in the Guards," Red returned. "Say, do you want to go uptown yourself?"

"Oh no—no one's a-longin' for me, old top. Toddle on. Oh, I say, if you're not going to be back before eleven-thirty, you'd better have lunch with her."

RED made no reply but to disappear up the path. Billy went to the seaplane and sat on the main pontoon. When they had come into the Cove, the tide was falling; now it was run out, and the floats of the seaplane stood stranded on the weedy and slippery shingle. Having nothing else to do, Billy reinspected his big twin engines—tested controls, tapped wires, examined the machine-guns, and the bombs in the racks below his and Cumnor's seats; he saw that the rockets, with their gafflike steel heads, were set firmly in their sockets forward, with a spring coiled above each to drive it down when discharged. Fuel- and oil-tanks were full.

Billy loafed luxuriously in the warm November sun; this life had selling bonds in La Salle Street, Chicago—which had been Billy's pretense at employment prior to aforesaid note about the striped boats—beaten beyond possibility of recognition. The old Irishman with the little girl, who had come down to the wet sand, approached the seaplane timidly. Billy went toward them and halted them several yards away.

The little girl was winsome and very pretty; the man was a strongly built, crook-nosed old character with a chin which, in its day, certainly had been a fighting chin. But his fights, as well as Billy could make out from his brogue, had been purely Kerry affairs, though the more enjoyable for that.

Billy gave him Red's lunch and shared his own with the little girl; mentally, Billy composed cablegrams to Keith's circuit and Klaw and Erlanger, to sign the Irishman and book him, sights unseen, for the Big Time, his turn to be just smoking and talking to himself. He departed at last, as the tide was beginning to come in, leading the little girl another way up a precipitous, barely discernible path up the cliff. He had no difficulty at first; then, twenty feet above the beach, he fell; he caught himself before he went over the edge of the path; but he could not get footing. Billy scrambled up to support him from below; but the rocks, which were bare and loose, turned under him, and they both tumbled down together into the sea.

Billy sat up in the water, stupid and with head spinning. The old Irishman, who was less hurt, was patting and en-

couraging him. Billy gave assurance that he was all right; and the old man reluctantly departed. Billy went back to the seaplane. Red Cumnor now was returning from Strathcone.

"Hello! Been having a bout with the local Benny Leonard?"

Billy, his head still sore, informed Red briefly. Cumnor's curiosity altered to sudden concern.

"Signals and maps all safe, Billy?"

Boal felt quickly under his coat; he remembered feeling, mechanically, when he first came to. He took out the list of special signals for the day and chart-issue C 17. Everything was there.

"All right," he assured. "Why not?"

"Nora was warning me—"

"Nora?" Billy questioned. It was seriously and for information. Cumnor no longer was bantering; nor was he.

"The girl I've just seen; she says that all sorts of queer things have been happening about here recently. There's a German, they think,—a submarine officer,—who's put ashore in some lonely cove and who appears to have got about pretty much as he liked, so far. He went first by the name of Kelly, and so they call him that."

"An old man, Red, speaking mostly Gaelic?"

"One blamed good actor, if half what they tell about him's true—could fake Gaelic with you, all right. He went to a Dublin hotel night before last, they say, and left his receipted bill on the shore to prove it."

Billy went white. "You don't suppose—"

"That every old Irishman's Kelly of the Kaiser's Own? Of course not! I'm just asking about your old boy."

"He certainly got nothing off me." Billy went through all his papers again.

"Kelly's work wouldn't be as crude as that; do you know he didn't see those orders when you were knocked out?"

Billy regained his nerve. "I wasn't knocked out; he couldn't have got them out and put them back as they were."

"All right, then—that wasn't Kelly. Are we ready to start, sir?"

Billy delayed intentionally. He hadn't been entirely knocked out—that is, he thought he hadn't; but could he be sure? Well, even if he had been, that old Irishman still was just an old Irishman; Billy was sure of that. He would merely make a fool of himself reporting what had happened under the supposition that the old man was a German officer who had obtained British and American recognition signals for the day. No—he would have obtained more than that. He would have learned at least part of the route of the American transport-fleet. But that wasn't so. Besides, the credulous people of the district probably had imagined "Kelly."

"Look here, Bill!" Red Cumnor offered the alternatives curtly. "Either that man you rolled down the cliff with was not just an old Irishman; in which case we must drop everything else and get after him, first informing headquarters so all signals and the route of the transports will be changed. Or he was all right, and we'd better obey orders and get to our station *pronto*. Now are we ready, sir?"

"Make ready!" commanded Lieutenant William Boal.

THE tide was floating their pontoons again, and the wind, into which they headed, was blowing directly up the bay. They put on power and taxied out away from the shore; they rose and flew out in a wide, sweeping circle to the south. For an hour they flew into the wind, only gazing cursorily into the waters below; then, with the southwest capes of Ireland the merest specks behind, they circled and zigzagged back and forth over the waters assigned them for patrol. Thus midafternoon came.

By the altimeter before Billy Boal's seat, they were up three thousand feet now; by the air-speed indicator they were flying at a hundred miles an hour; their actual speed over the sea was forty miles more than that, or forty miles less, as they went with, or opposed, the wind. They sat—pilot behind and observer in front—three feet apart but without communication except by signs or a scribbled word or two, since they had started their motors in Ballycon Cove. Their twin-twelve engines, with

the twin air-screws thrashing before them, shut out and smothered all other sound. Below them, the water was broken frequently, now, by the plumed specks of steamships.

There were over thirty in sight just now—patrol-boats, armed trawlers, destroyers and freighters. Billy did not bother to classify them more carefully, since they were all on the surface and showing steam. He and Red had no concern with anything showing honestly upon the surface on a bright, sunlit afternoon like this. Their watch was chiefly for the depths below. For from a few thousand feet in the air one may see deep down through sunlit water. A U-boat moving only just submerged becomes very plain; a U-boat, even when down a couple of fathoms, still shows as a shadow. Only if quite deep, and unable to use the periscope and therefore helpless to strike, would a U-boat be safe from airplane observation this afternoon. Twilight and dusk —the early, long-lingering dusk—was its time to strike.

CUMNOR, at the nose of the fusilage and between the two air-screws, was gazing ahead more intently; he swung about and touched Billy's arm and pointed. Billy nodded his hooded head and altered his course slightly. Far in front—they were flying back toward Ireland now—they saw six small vessels convoying two larger ones. The flight of the seaplane was so swift, in comparison to the speed of the vessels, that Billy waited to see their shapes before being sure of which way they were going. Now, besides making out the sharpness of their prows, he could see the long, trailing scars of their wakes. They were all westward-bound and steaming very fast for water craft. They were six destroyers and two big armed liners—American war-vessels, all!

There was no mark to proclaim that. Billy knew it from his orders; and he saw that Red, leaning tensely forward, knew it too. The sight of those specks sent prickling points up under Billy's knitted hood and down to the fingertips of his gauntlets. For not only was that convoy American, but it was going to rendezvous with other similar convoys, slipping out from England and Ireland in flotillas of four and six and eight, to meet American transports bearing American battle divisions oversea!

Billy gazed up from them and looked about the air at his level. The faint, winged forms off to the right were two British seaplanes flying almost at the same level. A little higher up appeared the torpedo-shaped bags of British navy dirigibles, the new type of "Blimp" balloons. His orders for the day had informed him that there would be four of these on patrol over or near square DN22. He had observed two which had signaled him properly when approached a half-hour ago; two more now were in sight. Nothing about them stirred uneasiness in him. Sight of them left Cumnor, too, undisturbed. Billy gazed down to the sea again. He looked up once more and through the air about—and a bubble high above seized his sight.

It was a gray-blue, almost indistinguishable bubble, so ghostlike as it floated free up in the very empyrean that Billy doubted it even while he stared straight at it. Drifting slightly, it was no more palpable than an atom of dust in the wet film over the eye. Billy would have denied it to himself, but it kept its shape—the shape of a Blimp balloon. And what was a Blimp doing up there? The business of all proper Blimps was searching the sea for submarines; and that is not best done from three miles up.

Billy stretched an arm before him and seized the back of Cumnor's jacket and jerked it. He did not dare to take his gaze from the balloon for fear of losing it. Red turned around and Billy pointed. But for a while Cumnor saw nothing. So Billy took pencil and scribbled upon his pad without looking:

"Blimp, three miles up!"

HE tore off the sheet—it was thick and tough like a card—and thrust it forward. Cumnor seized it, looked up again and saw the balloon. Billy opened the throttles wider and pulled back the elevators to climb.

He saw Red's fingers go to his radio-

key; he glanced back and saw that the aërial wires were unreeled and properly trailing. Now he saw that Red was sending, undoubtedly calling the flagship of the American flotilla below. Cumnor would not try to communicate by wireless with other aircraft; they also could send; but while they were in the air with motors clattering and air-screws thrashing, they could not receive.

"Dirigible of Blimp type," Red was flashing, "not described in my orders of day, two points to right and ahead of your position—est. elevation fifteen thousand ft."

Billy looked down for the response as Red repeated after a minute's wait. The cruiser would not attempt response by wireless; it would reply by smoke-puffs or other visual signals. And now smoke was spurting from the side of the largest ship of the flotilla below. Billy circled carefully to keep it in view. No sound of firing floated through the racket of the motors, but the smoke-puffs continued—not regularly, as in ordinary gunfire, but in the broken, irregular puffs of gun-signals.

"Stand by to attack enemy aircraft!" Billy read.

They were spreading out white strips on the deck to confirm it. Billy grabbed up binoculars and gazed down as steadily as the vibration allowed. They formed a broad, bold triangle in white upon the forecastle of the leading liner; and beside the triangle they spread out a white V proclaiming to the sky:

"Stand by to attack enemy aircraft!"

Evidently that distant blue Blimp was not described in the orders of the day for the commander of the flotilla; but the signal was not yet to attack; it directed only to "Stand by!" It called, therefore, for recognition signals from all aircraft in sight; and the challenged balloon, high above, evidently was satisfactorily returning recognition-signals by its wireless to the ships below. For as the two British seaplanes, in response to the ship's order, had turned in closer, fresh smoke-puffs, broken at new intervals, began bursting out below; and men shifted the long, wide strips of white canvas crossing the forward deck of the big liner.

"T T" they spelled. "Return to patrol stations!" And in obedience, the two British seaplanes swooped away to the right again. But Billy Boal only steered straighter for that very high balloon, and he jerked his "joy-stick"—the elevating lever—back into the pit of his stomach as he half stood in his excitement and leaned forward, striking Cumnor on the shoulder again.

Red was snapping his wireless acknowledgment of the "Return to station" order; if he had noticed the increasing steepness of their climb, he had given it no significance. Red turned to Billy now, and seeing Billy's face, he straightened suddenly in alarm. Billy yelled at him wildly, but he could not hear; Billy gesticulated and struck him again, pointing and waving. Red climbed from his seat-pit and thrusting his head back beside Billy's, he made out of the shout in his ear just two syllables:

"Kelly!"

RED returned to his seat as Billy settled back behind his controls; and Red began to understand. Billy's panic was return of his fear that the old Irishman of Ballycon Cove was "Kelly," that the Germans therefore had knowledge of a stretch of the course of the American transports soon to come into sight, that the return of recognition-signals by that far-off Blimp balloon meant nothing.

Cumnor put his hand on his radio sending-key and spun about again and looked at Billy. He was asking, by sign, whether Billy wanted word spread of what they both feared; but Billy shook his head. Billy's lips pressed tight together, and lines of strain had come beside his eyes. He did not wish signals sent now, for he was not yet sure; he wished to test his fear first.

They were flying up very steeply now, and with throttles wide open; they had started more than two miles below the balloon which they meant to challenge, and circling as they climbed, they passed beyond it and far below. The speed-indicator gave their sweep through the air as *"150,"* and Cumnor, neglecting his radio, fingered the breech of the machine-gun before him and swung it gently upon its swivel.

He leaned over the side of the *nacelle* and counted his bombs arranged in the racks; he touched, very gently, the triggers which would release the springs coiled under the gaff-headed rockets, and he found that they all had tension. He looked up again when Billy "bounced" the machine in the way he sometimes did when he wanted his observer to look around and wasn't in any special hurry. He found Billy pointing once more; and following the direction, Red made out still another blue Blimp which had been concealed, before, beyond a patch of high-floating cloud.

THEY were up more than two miles now, and with the increasing altitude, it was plain that wind-strength and the complexity of the air-currents was increasing. Here to the right, there to the left, they ran into powerful gusts, aiding them or holding them back, shaking and bouncing them always. The seaplane was rocking and tipping now like a little boat on the ocean. They were coming close enough to the first of the two doubtful balloons so that they could see that it was navigating, a mile above them, quite a different stratum of air; it seemed to be blowing, not only more violently but also crosswise to this lower wind. And Billy, as he climbed, became less a motor-driver of the air than a sailor, catching this rising sweep of wind to carry him up more swiftly, fighting another and dodging out of it while his eyes searched the light clouds, which were beginning to be about them, for hint of more favorable currents.

He could see that the crew of the balloon—far more governed by the wind than he—also were maneuvering. Billy circled far away from the dirigible again as he climbed, and at last he returned almost on the same level.

If it was not a British Blimp, certainly it looked like a perfect copy. Its great gas-envelope, a couple of hundred feet long, bulged slightly forward; the stern showed the familiar four fins and rudders. Below the gas-bag hung the car, like a great airplane body without wings, with engine and air-screw forward, mounting guns and bearing bombs. Plainly it displayed the painted red and white and blue-circle insignia of the British air-service; and now, as the airplane approached it in challenge, a man stood up in one of the seat-pits and waved a flag in the private signal of the day. But Billy Boal held the seaplane straight to the charge and dashed on.

Before him Cumnor crouched behind the machine-gun and waited. Billy was putting up quite a risk to Red; and Red recognized and accepted it. If that balloon was really British, it would not fire no matter how close this American airplane came; if it were merely masquerading,—if it were a German balloon up there to spy upon and send to the submarines intelligence of the coming of the American transports,—this was going to be a mighty good test of German nerves. For Germans would not know whether the Americans were sure that they were enemy or not, and if they let these Americans come too close, and the Americans were sure—

Ah! A spit of smoke spattered from the balloon-car's gun, and beside Billy and Red, explosive bullets burst. They were Germans!

A BULLET caught a wooden strut of the seaplane and snapped it, scattering splinters. Billy felt them on his face; but Red was firing back now, and before them floated the steam-smoke of their machine-gun. Red was giving it to them; and all at once ballast—bombs, sandbags, other objects—tumbled from the balloon-car hanging just ahead, and the balloon rose straight higher. Bullets from its machine-gun and grenades showered down as it went overhead. It had been bad to come in there upon the balloon flying at the same level; the proper point of attack was from above. But Billy had had to bring Red—and himself—in at the same level to test out the enemy; his object, a minute ago, was not to attack first. Now he had free fighting.

He could not climb as steeply or as fast as a balloon dropping ballast; but his wings, which handicapped him there as against the Blimp's gas-bag, gave him far greater speed and more advantage of lateral maneuver. So he slanted

away as he climbed, his joy-stick hard back. He went up a thousand feet more—two thousand, three. It was hard climbing, higher up there in that rare air more than three miles over the sea—eighteen thousand feet, the altimeter said, but at last he gained the level upon which the balloon, with all ballast gone, was balancing. He even gained a little more—only a hundred feet or so, but it was enough; he came back and leaning forward, yelled at Red: "Rockets! Rockets!"

Cumnor did not hear him, but he knew. He was firing the machine-gun only for the first second of their renewed approach. Red's fingers played again on the triggers of the rocket-releases. For there was little chance, passing at their flying speed, of hitting the men in the car with machine-gun bullets. He could spray the bullets through the gas-bag, of course—he had done that; but the tiny holes started only tiny leaks; they did not let in enough air to mix with the balloon-gas to make an inflammable mixture, even though incendiary bullets went in. But rockets—well, they would tear a different hole.

Red released the first as they swooped upon the great gas-bag now; the spring flung it down free from the planes before the fuse ignited, and it flashed into a blaze. It shot down, drawing its flaming tail behind it, and passed short of the gas-envelope. Another rocket already was in the air; it missed too; and Billy for a moment could not see the balloon. He had passed overhead, and the wings of the lower plane shut it out, but he knew that two more rockets had been released. Red was looking down too. Now they could see the balloon, and a rocket—whether the third or the fourth, they didn't know—was just above it. The gaff-head tore into the big blue bag. It sagged, and the rocket, dragging along its flaming tail, dropped in and disappeared. The whole envelope shook and trembled. Then flames crept out of the rent, and the bag bulged—burst and flew all into fire, rocking and swinging with the wind.

Below it, two black figures dropped; one went down, down that frightful, dizzy distance to the sea. Above the other the dome of a parachute suddenly expanded, and he began floating, borne by the wind. The great blazing bag was going down now more swiftly than he; it went past him a hundred yards or so away.

BILLY BOAL gasped half with relief, half in horror. The man whose parachute had opened probably would be picked up by some of those patrol specks way down there on the glistening sea; but to hurl the other so into the abyss! Yet, beyond any doubt, they were enemies out there to send information to guide U-boats to strike in the dark at American ships and American troops.

The gun upon the biggest of the ship-specks was going again. Puff-puff—puff-puff-puff! Probably sailors were spreading the signal strips once more to call the other seaplanes to attack the second blue balloon up here. But Billy would not wait for them; Red turned to him and waved an arm. Billy nodded and steered for the other gas-bag.

It appeared to have attempted, a few minutes ago, to come to make attack when the first balloon was assailed. But now, having witnessed the swift fate of the first, it was abandoning the plan of fighting for itself. From far off, Billy could see the two men of its crew climbing the ropes of its rigging; they had seen the uselessness of merely casting over ballast. They were cutting away the car! Cumnor sprayed machine-gun bullets through the bag, but long before the seaplane could get above to dart down those deadly rockets, the car dropped and hung by one end. Then it fell free, and with the parting of the last strands, the balloon-bag shot up as swiftly as the car went down. Up past the level of the seaplane—up, up to a thousand feet—three, four thousand more; higher and higher ascended the gas-bag, with the two men tied to the lines.

Boal did not attempt to follow the second dirigible to such pinnacles of the air. It caught very swift winds up there; and though Billy had his twin motors, and the balloon now was absolutely without power, he found himself racing through the cross-currents here

below to keep even with the sweep of the German gas-envelope. For men were escaping with it who were enemies and who had shown the private signals for the Allies for the day.

It was useless now to send warning to the ships below, or to other Allied officers, that the Germans had the signals; everyone must know that. Billy's business was to follow this balloon and see that neither of these men got away. The other Allied airplanes seemed to have left that task to him, and to have gone on other business of their own. Following the swift drift of the balloon blown along above, Billy was flying north and east now; the convoy and the other ships to the south were sinking from sight. When the American transports came up in a few hours, what would be done down there in the lessening light where the German aircraft would have sent the U-boats to rise and strike?

Billy went weak and sick as he thought of it. "Kelly!" The face of the Irishman, whom he had proposed to have put on Keith's circuit, came before him. Red Cumnor, who had no target for gun or for rockets or bombs and was therefore idle, seemed to be thinking about the same things too; he turned and, scribbling, handed back a card.

Billy could not make it out very well, but it seemed to say: *"Maybe it wasn't your Kelly."* That meant that maybe another officer of the British or American service had been tricked by the Germans; the fact that they had the Allied signals did not prove that they had got them from Billy Boal.

He gazed overhead again. The bullets which Red had sprayed through the gas-bag were beginning to show some effect, for the balloon was certainly sinking. Billy's altimeter showed the same altitude of fifteen thousand feet which they had held for half an hour. Also the increasing coldness of the late afternoon speeded the contraction of the gases held within the balloon; the sun, which had been shining hot an hour before, was down low upon the sea, its radiance gone crimson, its heat all but fled. The balloon sank to scarcely a thousand feet above the seaplane, and Billy could observe now that one of the men in the ropes seemed to be manipulating the valves to select the current of wind in which he desired to be blown.

The man in the balloon let out a good deal more gas to do this, but he changed his direction sharply. Billy swung to keep close and circled so as not to pass ahead. The balloon lost elevation so fast that it dropped below the seaplane, and the intentional guiding of the descent became more and more certain. The headlands of Ireland were beginning to identify themselves in spite of the failing daylight. Those great indentations were Dingle Bay, Kenmare River, the Bay of Bantry.

The German who was controlling the balloon-valves suddenly let out a great deal of gas. Billy pointed the nose of the seaplane down and let her dive to drop as fast; he flattened out and swerved past the balloon as close as he could. He came back and passed within ten yards of the side where the men were hanging. He caught a profile clearly—a crooked nose and a prominent chin. The profile of the Irishman of Ballycon Cove!

THE "Irishman" was in the uniform of the British air-service now, of course; and he wasn't old at all. His agility and his nerve, as he moved in the ropes, were those of a young man. But that profile before the sun!

Billy leaned forward and struck Red and yelled and pointed. "Kelly! That's Kelly!"

They were far past now, of course, for the balloon was blown by the same wind which was carrying them along; and while the gas-bag floated, they had to fly sixty miles an hour through the air to stay up.

Billy banked sharply, came about and returned. He did not know what he was going to do when he came back, more than he had been doing by merely following to capture the man when the balloon came down. He could not shoot helpless men hanging in the ropes of a falling balloon. But one of them did not wait to see whether he could or not.

A man dropped, feet first, with arms

pulling on a parachute. It opened and floated down. The other man stayed by the balloon. And the capes were just below.

Whichever Billy followed, the other must escape. Whichever was Kelly, there was only going to be one for the seaplane to capture. For the balloon, lightened of the weight of one man, had risen a little and was going to come down somewhere on the land. The seaplane could not come down on the land, with its pontoon undercarriage, without being hopelessly wrecked. But it could come down in that bay below.

Billy shut off power and let her dive. He passed the man floating down under the parachute; and just above the water, Billy "flattened her out" and took the surface gently with his floats. He looked over to where the German was splashing into the bay, and he put on power and taxied to him.

"Kamerad!" the man gave himself up. "Kamerad!"

Billy gazed at his profile and taking him up on the pontoon, taxied to the nearest shore.

"Look out for the boche!" he yelled to Red as the pontoons grounded. "And report quick that Kelly's just come down in a British uniform with a balloon. I'm after him!"

THAT night at twelve o'clock it was officially known that the American transports had passed safely on their way to France; the next morning American soldiers were disembarking at that particular port from which they wrote home that afternoon that, to their disappointment, they had passed through the submarine zone without even the alarm of an attack.

"Which is about the niftiest piece of work that His Majesty's Navy and our own ever toasted each other for," Billy Boal informed Red Cumnor as they sat together before the little Irish inn at Bantry. "The way it was done was this: The admiralty was absolutely informed that Brother Boche had his darling little spies lurking down by the Cork and Kerry coast; so they decided to utilize them. Accordingly they sent, as carelessly as the German idea of British inefficiency would fall for, that bunch of secret stuff to us and everyone down here. The idea was to have it fall into enemy hands."

"Through us?" Red inquired with bent head.

"The old boy to whom I reported didn't say that we'd been definitely nominated to be the sieve," Billy continued meekly. "We were just one of many expected to leak—unintentionally. I may say they gave us credit for unintentions. Well, Brother Boche certainly fell for it, particularly when the Admiralty sent out that fake convoy to go to the place where we were so particularly ordered to scout. Our friend Kelly seems to have gathered fifty subs —of which, I rejoice to report, some seven will probably never rise again—to lay for the boys from home right smack across the course. And the real course was only a couple of hundred miles to the south!

"So when I reported about Kelly and how he'd got away from me, they assured me I wouldn't be shot, and for heaven's sake not to make any break by capturing Kelly yet. To make it worse, they seemed to have heard of our little scraps with the boche Blimps, and they had the nerve to compliment me on that." Billy buried his head. "And there's a perfectly good bank on La Salle Street which is flying one large flag with a service-star in the middle for me!"

"And Mother out in Denver," Red added, "has got in our front window, *'A man from this house is serving his country in the Navy!'* Cheer up, old scout. Kelly's got away; but by this time he must be wise. And if we're sore, he's having some headache too. And if I know a crook-nosed German, he's going to try for a return engagement to get back at us. Do we ask for a transfer to kitchen-service behind the lines; or do we stick and take him on?"

"*Fire Correct!*"—Mr. Balmer's next exciting story of "The Yankees Over There"—deals with the superhazardous adventures of the airplane artillery observers. You'll find it—if you get your copy early—in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale February 1st.

The Hand of Adventure

by William Almon Wolff

TO remark that falling in love affects different men in different ways would be inexcusably banal. So that fact shall not be noted here. The point to be considered, anyway, is the effect meeting Cynthia Fleming, and falling in love with her, which he did promptly, had upon Bill Westcott. It, or she, did things to Bill—did them quickly and noticeably.

Bill's life had been pretty eventful and colorful before he met Cynthia. He'd been one of those chaps who always seemed to be on the verge of accomplishing something, but never quite bring it off. One trouble with Bill was that he didn't wait long enough. He'd get well started in some good job, and then he'd hear the call of the wild and go skyhooting off to answer it. He'd punched cows and worked in mines in Arizona and Alaska; he'd been in railroad work in various parts of the country; he'd worked in banks and other respectable places. He had a tremendously varied experience, but—well, some one said once that he'd been born without the capacity for assimilating experience, and no one had been able to put up a successful argument against that assertion.

Bill was always making a fine, fresh start. He was the greatest chap for doing that you ever saw. There was something tremendously engaging about him, especially when hard knocks had given him, for a little while, a sort of humility. He was a fine-looking chap—about six feet two in his socks, big all around, with light hair that burned itself to tow in the summer, and blue eyes, and a skin that was as clear as a young girl's without being in the least effeminate. There wasn't an ounce of fat on him; he was exactly the sort of chap to make an impression on a girl, especially a young and rather inexperienced one. The impression had never lasted very long, but you rather got the idea, and not exactly from him, either, that that might be because he had never followed such an opening up, never tried to make it lead to something definite and permanent.

BILL WESTCOTT blew into New York, looking the way one of Praxiteles' models would have looked in twentieth-century clothes after six months on the range, about six weeks before he met Cynthia. He landed a job at once, of course; he always did, thanks to his friends, of whom he had a ridiculous number. This time it was with the Revell truck people. Revell trucks were pretty nearly standard for use in certain lines; Revell production

was too limited to make any trust or monopoly-talk possible, but direct competition with the Revell truck was pretty infrequent, just the same.

It was Sam Dwight, whom he had known for years, and with whom he had gone through high school and the one year he had stayed in college, who got his job for him. Sam was sales-manager, and drawing ten thousand a year, if office gossip was correct—which in that case it probably was. But Bill went to work for twenty-five dollars a week, with a prospect of thirty as soon as Sam could pull some strings, and was right in considering himself lucky.

Probably it was the contrast between Dwight's position and his own that depressed him a bit. It wasn't exactly pleasant to see Sam roll in and make for his private office while Bill worked, with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, at his job of juggling figures. He was in the sales-department, but he wasn't out doing any selling. His work was to furnish a lot of the ammunition the salesmen used—to get up charts and statistical tables concerning costs—operation, repairs, maintenance, all the thousand and one things the sales-department thought it might be well for salesmen to tell their prospects.

It wasn't a bad job, as a matter of fact, and it held real prospects of advancement for a man who took it in the right spirit. Bill was straight in line for an executive job, if he'd stopped to think about it, which he didn't. Sam Dwight liked him; like everyone else, he was always expecting Bill to settle down, find himself and bore into some job instead of quitting it to rush halfway across the continent in obedience to the beckoning hand of adventure. But of course Sam knew him pretty well too, and would have considered a pretty rigorous apprenticeship, a well-defined probationary period, absolutely necessary, even if the policy of Revell's had left him any option in the matter—which it didn't.

But Bill wasn't capable of adjusting himself in just the right way to his job and to Sam Dwight's ideas. He was grateful enough; it wasn't that. And he didn't think he ought to be getting any more money. He was rather sorry for himself because he wasn't, but he didn't go farther and feel sore at anyone else. His feeling was a curious one, one rather hard to explain. In effect, he was accepting the fact of failure; he was reconciled to the idea that he would never reach such heights as Sam Dwight and half a dozen other men who had started on even terms with him had scaled with such apparent ease. He didn't blame anyone else for that, but he didn't blame himself either. The idea was, rather, that he had been born a couple of hundred years too late, that in the days when brawn and nerve brought fortunes, he would have been as successful as anyone.

ONE reason Westcott made such a vivid and favorable impression on girls was that he was able to throw a sort of romantic light upon himself and his comparative failure. He was refreshingly different from young men whose principal thought was of business. He seemed less mercenary, more romantic. And he had a lot of parlor tricks. He could sing pretty well; and in a boat at night, or on a dark piazza, when he sat singing and accompanying himself on a guitar, he must have been —well, pretty thrilling.

His looks helped too. He went in for clothes, and considering how little money he ever had to work with, he accomplished wonders. He wore rather odd things and looked after them well; that helped. He wasn't quite foppish, but he came perilously close to it, and the only thing that saved him there was that he usually carried a lot of photographs of himself that had been taken when he was roughing it somewhere in the outskirts of civilization. And at a dance where fancy dress was worn, he would appear as a cowboy, or a miner, or something of that sort, and so make good his explanation that his sartorial splendors when he was in the city were simply a change from the simplicity of his more customary garb.

The reason that girls who in the beginning were disposed to have more or less of a crush on him usually fell away from their allegiance so quickly was that all that sort of thing wasn't quite in character. In an artist of some sort,

a painter or a poet, perhaps, Bill's indifference to success would have been all right, would have been in keeping. But there was nothing of the artist about him, and people were likely to feel, after a time, that Bill's indifference wasn't real—that it was an affectation. It was protective really, when you come down to it; it was his way of maintaining his self-respect when he saw himself in contrast with chaps like Sam Dwight.

You were likely to think Bill was conceited, which wasn't true at all. He must have had some pretty bad times, times when he saw himself stripped bare of all illusion. He had one of them after he met Cynthia Fleming.

SAM DWIGHT took him out to a country club one day for golf. It was in the middle of the week, but a slack one, so that they could both get away early, and there weren't many people on the links. Cynthia was one of them, and they overtook her at the fifth hole, where she was searching for a lost ball. Bill had been watching her for some minutes. She was too far away, at first, for him to get more than a general impression, but he saw a tall, lithe girl, free and supple in her movements, all of whose poses, as she moved about in the rough, fell into lines of an extraordinary grace. Her sleeves were short; her arms were very brown; and her face, too, was honestly tanned. She was dark, her hair almost black. But her eyes were blue, and he could guess at the complexion she would have when her sunburn had worn off. But these were things that he did not see, of course, until they were quite close.

"There's Cynthia Fleming," Dwight said. He grinned. "She's hopping mad, too, probably! She hates a lost ball just the way a good man does."

"Good-looking girl," said Bill.

"And then some!" Dwight nodded emphatically. "She's alone—I'll ask her to join us. She's Fleming's daughter, you know."

"Oh—our Fleming?"

Henry Fleming was vice president of Revell's. Bill knew him only by sight; he gave little time to the business. He had been largely responsible for its early financing, but of late an idle vice presidency and the collection of his dividends had represented his chief interest in the company. He was rather an anomaly. His dividends weren't very big; Revell, who hated idleness, saw to that. He wanted Fleming back on the job. But Fleming, smilingly resolute, refused to return, since he had enough. He was writing a history of New York, and it took all his time, and satisfied him utterly.

As luck would have it, Bill Westcott spied Cynthia Fleming's ball, and told Dwight, who called to her.

"I want you to know Bill Westcott, Cynthia," he said. "You ought to be nice to him because he spotted your ball. There it is!"

"But it hasn't any business to be there!" she said, following Dwight's finger with her eyes. "I'm grateful—but it's not right!"

Bill went over and picked the ball up. It was just on the edge of the rough.

"I'm a sort of *Sherlock Holmes*," he said. "Look here, Miss Fleming! You were looking over there. Do you see that tree—with all the moss? I think your ball struck that and came back here on a ricochet. There's a moss-stain on it, anyway."

"That's clever," she said. "And—it's awfully comforting, too. You've no idea how much better that makes me feel, Mr. Westcott!"

NOW, that was the tiniest, the most trivial of incidents. But it did point the introduction—mark it, make it even more of an event than it would have been if Sam Dwight had just named them to each other. Bill could understand her feeling about wanting to find that ball where she had been looking, and she saw that he understood, and liked him because he did.

"Shall we play together?" Dwight suggested. "I warn you, Bill, she'll make us both look cheap. She's got it on most of the men and all the women in the club."

"I'm not proud," said Bill, cheerfully. "Golf's just exercise to me."

She looked at him rather sharply when he said that, but she made no comment. The three of them went on, and

it just happened that Dwight was off the course a good deal, while the others stayed in the fairway, and so were alone and had a chance to talk. They didn't say much of anything, but Bill felt himself going. There was something about this girl, something indefinable, that he felt he had always been seeking and had never found before. He was caught, once or twice, thinking about her, when he ought to have been ready with a response to some question, but she wasn't at all resentful. It looked as if she rather liked him.

The shadows were pretty long when they finished the round and got back to the clubhouse.

"Tea?" Dwight suggested.

"It's too late," said Cynthia. She sat on the porch-rail, tapping her foot for a moment. "I'm trying to think—Oh, there's enough! I tell you what, Sam. You and Mr. Westcott fuss around quite a long time with your showers and your changing. And then come on over and have dinner. Dad probably wont come down—or he may not be home at all. He's just as likely to be fussing around somewhere in the Bronx in the runabout."

"We accept—with enthusiasm," said Dwight. Bill tried to say something deprecatory, but didn't get very far. He was much too pleased to be successful in such an effort. And later, in the locker-room, after their showers, he said:

"I'm strong for that girl, Sam! She's a corker!"

"Well—I think so," said Dwight, with a good deal of meaning. "I'm pretty strong for her myself, Bill."

Bill gave him rather a long look, and Dwight's eyes shifted.

"That wasn't meant for 'Hands off,' Bill," he said after a moment. And of course they both got rather confused, and talked hurriedly of other things.

PRESENTLY they got into Dwight's car, one of those low, fast cars in which four people can be very comfortable and very companionable, and went over to Fleming's house, an old Colonial building that he had retrieved and restored lovingly, and that now was covered with vines and roses. Fleming himself didn't turn up, and so Dwight and Bill dined alone, and as it turned out, riotously, with Cynthia. It was one of those wonderful parties that come off, sometimes, when they are utterly unplanned, and scarcely ever when they have been anticipated and arranged. After dinner they went off in the car, and picked up a girl Cynthia knew and drove over to the Sound, and danced for a while at one of the inns; and then they drove home under a white moon that bathed the Westchester country in a silver flood.

"*I* think it's been a lovely party!" said Cynthia when they were saying good night to her on her porch. "You're a jewel, Sam! I expected to be horribly bored this evening!"

"I'm glad you weren't," said Sam. "Oh—I can get a bucket of water at the well, can't I? I'd better put some in, I think."

Bill waited on the porch with Cynthia. He felt a little unsteady. He knew it might be just the moonlight and the way his pulses were still keeping time to the rhythm of the last waltz. But he thought it was Cynthia—he knew it was.

"I don't think I can tell you quite how good a time I've had," he said, just when the silence was beginning to be—well, definitely a silence. "I—I'd like to see you again."

"Of course!" she said. She was utterly frank; if Bill was going to move her, he hadn't done it yet. "I wish you'd come again—with Sam, or by yourself. "I'll be glad to see you any time. We're not as hard to reach here as we seem to be. We're only ten minutes from the station."

"I'll telephone, if I may," he said. And then Sam was ready, and he had to go.

THAT was how it began. Bill couldn't be quite sure, at once, that this was the real thing. There'd been so many girls before Cynthia! And yet his doubts didn't endure very long; they couldn't. It may have been the second time he saw her that he stopped having any doubts; it may have been the third. Whichever it was, a black mood came upon him as he went home

on the train. It was one of the times when he had to face himself, and life, and when things appeared to him strictly and absolutely as they were and not as he would have liked them to be.

He thought of himself and of Sam Dwight. And as the train carried him southward toward the city, all the illusions and the veils that had covered things were torn away. He saw himself a failure—and a failure not because he had been born too late, but because something had kept him from taking hold of life and wringing from it what he wanted. Dwight had done that; so had scores of other men he knew. Had they had a better start than he, a better chance? He wanted to think so; he needed desperately to think so. But just for that hour he couldn't.

If Cynthia hadn't liked him, and hadn't let him see pretty plainly that she liked him, too, things would probably have been different. What made him so desperate was the feeling that he did have at least an even chance with her, that other things being equal, he needn't be afraid of Sam Dwight or any other man. Other things weren't equal, of course; that was just the trouble.

Cynthia, while she fed his vanity by showing him her liking for him, starved it in another way. He got no sympathy from her when he began to talk about his affairs as if his lack of success were the result of hard luck. For one thing, she didn't consider him so notably unsuccessful.

"You've had a tremendous lot of fun," she said. "You've learned a lot of things that men who settle down to a grind early never have a chance to learn. You've got a splendid experience to draw on."

"Yes—and I'm getting thirty dollars a week!"

"You don't have to keep on at thirty dollars a week," she said. "It's no sort of use! I'm not going to feel sorry for you! I think you're rather to be envied."

They argued that out, but she bore him down, because she so resolutely refused to see his point of view. He couldn't use his principal argument; he couldn't tell her, very well, that he wanted to ask her to mary him and couldn't do it because he didn't have money enough. That cut and rankled, of course, that and the utter freedom Dwight had. He almost hated Dwight, at times, but he was able to pull himself together, always, when he found himself feeling that way. He knew how much he really owed to Dwight.

And he was anchored; that much was definite. A chance to join an expedition to South America that he would have jumped at a year before didn't even stir him. He was making a sincere and determined effort to make good where he was; he tried to believe Dwight when the latter told him that there really were good chances of advancement. Dwight knew, too; he wasn't just trying to cheer Bill up.

"Truman's slated to go abroad," he said. "I happen to know that the Ferris people are after young Stewart, and there are personal reasons to make him anxious to get to Detroit instead of staying here. I'm not promising anything, and I don't really know anything. But I think you're mighty well advised to hang on."

BILL was, as a matter of fact, making good. He was growing enthusiastic about the business, and he was beginning to make himself known outside the limited circle of people in the office with whom his daily routine brought him into contact. He hit upon some rather interesting suggestions concerning details of office management, and put them up to Dwight, his chief, as in duty bound. Dwight, in turn, passed them on to John Revell, and the result was a curt but flattering note from the president of the company.

Getting on was a slow business—trying to the nerves, too, of one with Bill's record and industrial history. But it did seem to be reasonably sure. He felt justified, anyway, in seeing Cynthia as often as she would let him, and that was pretty often. They were good friends; but though Bill so studiously avoided any declaration, though he was really punctilious as to that, she couldn't have been deceived.

Bill was getting up a fine head of steam. Dwight was pleased with his

work and told him so, and that he was trying to work another raise for him, with fair prospects of success. Cynthia listened cheerfully to Bill's talk of the office and his work. She liked that side of him, evidently enough, though she found the other side of him even more attractive. He had so many qualities that Dwight didn't have at all! And they appealed to her. Her father had taught her to like the sort of man who doesn't allow himself to become swamped by business; Bill's accomplishments, his ability to grow impassioned about poetry and music and unbusinesslike things like that, made her warm to him.

Bill was unconsciously accepting, too, Cynthia's views about a lot of things. He wasn't half so sorry for himself as he had been; he lacked the time for that sort of feeling. He looked forward eagerly to the impending changes in the organization, saw no reason why he shouldn't step into young Stewart's job, possibly into Truman's. He made Dwight almost impatient, at times, with his gratitude—so much so that Dwight, who wasn't having a very happy time, since he wasn't blind to Cynthia's feelings, almost snapped at him.

"All I did was to give you a chance to find yourself," he said. "You've started doing that. That's all that was ever necessary. You've got to do anything you do, by yourself. I'm not going to help you—I can't. No one can, when you come down to it. You have to stand on your own feet."

Then Truman went abroad, and young Stewart, after hesitating for a couple of days, decided to turn down the Ferris offer and take Truman's work. That left one vacancy instead of two, among the real jobs, but Bill had no doubts or fears. Dwight, certainly, was working for him, and didn't hesitate to say so.

"Stewart's been a good assistant, but you can be a better one, if you settle down to it," he said. "In some places they'd promote a salesman, but I'm not strong for that unless a man has proved he's got executive ability, and a lot of good salesmen haven't got it at all. So —it looks like you."

Cynthia knew what was in the wind, and she was tremendously eager and excited, and was invincibly hopeful too. Probably she knew what would happen as soon as Bill got word of his promotion; if she did, she wasn't at all afraid.

And then Bill didn't get the job.

TRUMAN had gone; Stewart had moved into his room. For a week there had been a sort of interregnum, with Bill doing Stewart's work for his old salary—and a good deal of his own special work thrown in. Then came a morning when he walked into the office, glanced casually over at Stewart's desk and saw a stranger sitting there, looking worried, and rather aimlessly going through the papers that had accumulated. Before Bill could sit down—before, really, he could fully understand the significance of what he saw—an office boy hurried to him.

"Mr. Dwight wants to see you," said the boy.

"What's the idea, Sam?" asked Bill.

"Don't ask me!" Dwight snapped. "I'm sick about it, Bill! Mr. Revell simply put this chap Johnson in Stewart's place. He's a cousin of his wife's, or some such thing. I'm instructed to tell you that your salary is to be increased five dollars a week."

Bill reeled, figuratively.

"But—well—I'd figured I was sure of that job!" he said. "Gee, Sam—"

"I'm just as sick about it as you can be!" said Dwight. "I wanted you for the work."

"Well—oh, well, I suppose that's what I ought to have expected! It's just about my luck!"

Bill's voice reflected his acquiescence in what had happened. Dwight swung around suddenly in his chair.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Is that the way you're going to take it? I—why—I'd go in and pull Revell's nose! And if that's treason, why, make the most of it!"

"What's the use, Sam? I'm hoodooed—that's all. I never have amounted to anything and I suppose I never shall."

"Eh?" Dwight stared at him. And then he laughed—a short, disgusted laugh it was.

"I put my money on the wrong horse!" he said. "Probably the old man's right. He usually is. I don't know this bird he's handed me, but I guess he knew what he was doing. Get out, will you, Bill? Sorry—but I'm busy as the deuce."

Bill stared incredulously. But he went out, and he spent the rest of the morning in a daze. He was angry enough; if he was acquiescent, he wasn't at all resigned. But he was as angry at Dwight as at Revell; if Dwight had been sympathetic, Bill would have been almost reconciled to the loss of the job he had been counting upon. He would have taken a lot of comfort out of feeling sorry for himself. He did that, anyway, and it helped. But Dwight's curious outburst bothered him.

HE saw Cynthia that night.

"Oh, Bill—that's hard luck!" she said. She showed him a tenderness that had not been made manifest to him before. For a moment her hand touched his. "But it's just like Mr. Revell! He and Dad—" She stopped for a moment. "What are you going to do now?"

He stared at her. And just as if he had told her, she understood.

"Oh!" she said, and her whole manner changed, just as had Dwight's. "You're going to stay—"

He was bewildered; and the stress of the day had frayed his nerves.

"You too!" he said. "Dwight—he acted the same queer way! I don't understand! Of course I'm going to stay. I suppose I'll be working all my life for thirty-five dollars a week."

"Possibly," said Cynthia. "That wouldn't matter so much, though, unless you're really a thirty-five-dollar man."

He stared at her, almost truculent in his bewilderment. Not much more got said between them. He went home early.

And somehow, in the night, perhaps in the early morning, enlightenment came to him. He saw exactly what Dwight had meant, understood perfectly Dwight's manner, and Cynthia's. A hot, swelling rage filled him. He was at the office early; he had to wait for Dwight. And when Dwight came in, Bill was pacing around by his own locked desk.

"Hello, Sam!" he said. "I've just been hanging around to see you. I've caught on to myself, I guess. Feed my job to the cat, will you? I don't want it any more!"

Dwight stared at him.

"Quitting?" he asked almost hopefully. Bill nodded.

"Yes—thanks!" he said. "And say—when you see Cynthia, tell her, will you? I'm quitting a lot of things I haven't any right to keep on with."

For just a second Dwight's eyes flashed, and his shoulders grew square. Then he smiled.

"Sometimes people come back, Bill," he said gently. "I don't know about you—I don't think it'll be a case of coming back. You haven't been away; you hadn't arrived for the first time. Now—I rather think I see you coming."

Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"Well—I'm through here, anyway," he said. He put out his hand. "I—I guess you know I'm pretty grateful to you, old Sam. But the job—and—meeting some people—they don't seem to count at all beside the way you showed me up yesterday, now that I understand."

"Oh, shucks!" said Dwight, uncomfortably. "Consider yourself urged to reconsider and stick around, in view of the unusually good prospects, will you? I mean it, too—sort of."

BILL grinned and went out. And in the lobby of the building he ran into John Revell, who stopped him.

"I—er—regretted the necessity of—er—disappointing you, Mr. Westcott," he said. "I mean to say—you might have felt that you should have been Mr. Stewart's successor. Large matters of policy—"

"Lord—I don't care!" said Bill, interrupting. "I'm on my way to get a job worth two of Stewart's!"

"Eh? May I ask where?"

"Sure—and may I decline to tell you?"

If the words were at all equivocal, the tone wasn't. Bill took an unregen-

erate delight in watching John Revell's change of hue from red to purple. But he didn't wait long to enjoy that sight. He went on into the street, and then he stopped, and for a moment he felt like leaning against the nearest lamp-post.

He was facing a crisis, and he had to meet it by himself. That was a new thing in his experience. There was no Sam Dwight to back him now. Always before, in the small crises that had come, he had had Sam Dwight or some one else. And now, when he was facing a great crisis, and a real one, he had to stand on his own feet unaided, unsupported. He had no illusions about the urgency of the crisis itself. This was the real thing. It wasn't that he needed a job—just a job, any sort of a job, to keep himself alive. He had half a dozen resources when it came to that—friends, staple jobs that were always open, at a living wage, if little more, to a man who could shoot and ride and knew something about mining.

But such things wouldn't serve him this time. He had to make good, exactly and literally, on that boast he had flung at John Revell—had to make good for the sake of his own self-respect, for the sake of any chance he still might have with Cynthia Fleming. He gritted his teeth on that. He didn't think he had much chance with her, felt that, now that he understood fully what she had been thinking of him the night before, she must be through with him. But it was much more than his love for her that was at work within him now. He wanted to stand well in her sight.

A man nodded to him as he hurried by. For a moment, though he returned the nod, Bill couldn't place the man. Then he remembered him. It was Stephen Howard, of the Howard and Burton company—one of Revell's smaller rivals. He had met him at a trade luncheon to which Dwight had taken him. He knew few people in the business or trade; he began to speculate—grew excited. After all—why not? It was a hunch—but weren't hunches things to be played? They were! Most emphatically they were! He walked along slowly—tried rather desperately to work out some selling-points for himself.

HE didn't have any trouble in seeing Howard. About all he had to do, as a matter of fact, was to walk into the inner office. Howard looked at him curiously. And Bill went straight to his point—which was not his usual method.

"I'm looking for a job," he said succinctly.

Howard began to laugh—quietly, appreciatively. Then he stopped.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You probably don't appreciate just how funny that sounds to me! You see—Burton and I will probably be looking for jobs ourselves within a month! Revell wants our business, but I doubt if he wants us enough to pay us what we think we're worth. We probably have an inflated idea of our value."

"Are you joking?" asked Bill. He stared at Howard in amazement. He could see, without waiting for an answer, that no joke was being attempted. "Why—you people are about the only ones in this territory the Revell salesforce ever got nervous about!"

"That's probably why Revell's been underselling us the way he has," said Howard rather bitterly. "Haven't you known it? You were in the sales-department over there."

"I wasn't very deep in," said Bill with a grin. "And I didn't know it at all—had no idea there was any price-cutting going on."

"There was," said Howard. "We've lost out on every important reorder we were counting on this season, practically. People we worked on and got into the truck-buying mood, who bought one experimental truck from us and decided, after using it and comparing costs, to go ahead—they've all bought Revell trucks when they got ready to transform their delivery or trucking departments from horse-drawn vehicles to motors. We're groggy."

BILL got up. He felt a little as if he had dropped into the house of comparative strangers for dinner on the day of a funeral.

"Well—I'm sorry," he said awkwardly. "You see, I had a run-in—and I got out in rather a rush—and I was mighty anxious to land something."

"Don't hurry—we're not exactly busy around here," said Howard, moved by an impulse of real kindness. "Sam Dwight's talked to me about you once or twice. There's a prince—if Revell does make him cut list prices! I rather gathered from him that you were going to land Stewart's job."

"That's just it!" said Bill. And touched by Howard's friendliness, he blurted out a good deal of the story—including the boast he had flung in John Revell's teeth. Howard chuckled when he heard that.

"I'd have given something to see the old pirate!" he said. "Gee—wish I could help you to make good on that! I'd certainly like to put one spoke in old J. R.'s wheel before I get through!"

"Look here!" said Bill. "So would I! Why—why can't we join forces on that? I've got a hunch—it's just hitting me now, so I can't tell you much about it yet. But—will you give me a job as sales-manager—at seventy-five a week?"

"I've just been telling you how we were fixed—" Howard began rather impatiently.

"I don't have to collect my salary, do I?" said Bill, just as impatiently. "I want to be able to tell some people that that's my figure—and you'll admit it's not so darned high! Listen:

"Revell's following up all your prospects, isn't he? You're losing sales on price-cutting—because Revell's can afford to take a loss to force you to sell out, and make up for it later. I suppose you've figured on a certain production for this season—got money and material tied up?"

Howard nodded.

"And you might be willing to sell to Revell—on your own terms?"

"Anything's for sale—if the price is right," said Howard sententiously. "What are you driving at?"

"I'm driving at Revell's war-contract with the buying mission Sam Dwight's been camping out with for the last six weeks!" said Bill. "I don't know what price they've been talking. But I'd be willing to bet money it represents a whale of a profit! And I know something else. I know that there was just one selling-point—and that was quality. That means, so far as those people are concerned, endurance. All right! Revell's been poaching on your preserves. Why not slip around behind him and raid his? You've got the greater part of your production on your hands. You can afford to name a low price—and you can make quicker deliveries than Revell can. Why not go after part of that war-order?"

"Burt and I aren't in 'The Social Register,' for one thing," said Howard ironically. "About five sixths of the war-orders have been placed with people who had social connections."

"Well, I've got oodles of 'em!" said Bill vulgarly. "Fat lot of good they've done me so far, too. Besides, I happen to know one of the men on that mission. Here—can't you see? That's just what I'd have to attend to, if I were sales-manager. Come on—be a sport!"

"I'll try anything once!" Howard surrendered at discretion. "But if you try to draw your salary before you've made a sale! Well, we might manage seven-fifty—but seventy-five!"

"Forget that! I'll stick you good and plenty if I make good—and if I don't, I can gamble the time it'll take to find out and not be any worse off than I am now. I take it I'm hired?"

"You are—and may the Lord have mercy on your soul! Though I'll tell you that your talk sounds—well, possible. I don't see why I didn't think of that myself! I'm supposed to attend to selling—Burt's got the manufacturing end."

"It's just because I'm an amateur that I want to back my hunch," said Bill. "I suppose Sam Dwight or any other real salesman would laugh at me."

"I'm not laughing," said Howard. "But I'll admit my sense of humor and my goat have both been off on a vacation. When do you start in?"

"I've started. I'm off right now to hunt up that chap I know. I suppose I can arrange any sort of competitive endurance test?"

"Go as far as you like! If there's one thing in this world I'll bank on, it's our truck. Why—we've got your Revell truck beaten so far—"

"Don't call the Revell truck mine! Forget ancient history. So long!"

WESTCOTT didn't have time to see Cynthia Fleming in the next two days. He found a telephone-call from her when he got home, late at night, the day after he went to work for Howard and Burton. And there was one from Sam Dwight too. He looked rather grim as he tore up the slip of paper with Cynthia's message; he grinned at Dwight's call. But he didn't call Cynthia up, even the next morning. No matter what she thought, he was determined to wait. He didn't know how things were coming out. Nothing was working quite as he had thought it would. He had discovered, for example, that his friend preferred to separate social and business relations entirely.

Bill damned European ideas very heartily at that discovery. And he couldn't seem to get things going. The surprise he had counted upon springing upon Revell's was discounted by the slowness of the foreign buyers; there was time for Revell's people to bring all sorts of big guns into action against him. He didn't see Sam Dwight; he was up against salesmen and, to his amusement, at first, against Johnson, the man who had landed Stewart's job. He was disposed to despise Johnson, but he found him a worthy antagonist. Johnson didn't look brilliant; he was, however, more dangerous than he had at first sight appeared to be.

Yet in the end Johnson succumbed to the old trick of a red herring drawn across the trail. On the third day of his fight Bill abandoned the foreigners and turned suddenly upon a coal company that had for six months been hesitating about converting its equipment. Johnson followed him with a rush; and there was a fevered engagement which Johnson won by cutting prices grotesquely and promising, under heavy penalties, almost immediate deliveries. Bill left him master of the field and emerged unable to believe in his luck. Within three hours he had forced a showdown.

Johnson had overreached himself. To make good his promise to the coal-company would make impossible scheduled deliveries of trucks to the foreign government; Bill's red herring had proved a second string to his bow as well—if you don't mind slightly mixed metaphors. Howard-Burton trucks were actually required to make up the military order; the endurance-test won a higher price for Bill's truck than was paid for the part of the order that went to Revell.

BILL was a little unsteady when the thing was settled. He couldn't quite believe it. The first thing he did was to make for a telephone in a secluded spot and call Cynthia.

"You did it!" she said as soon as she heard his voice. "Oh, Bill—I'm so glad!"

"But how did you know?" he asked her, amazed.

"Sam kept me posted," she said. "That's—that's the only reason I didn't call you up again! Bill—how soon are you coming out to tell me about—everything?"

"I'd accept an invitation to dinner," he said brazenly.

He got it. And when he left the telephone, he was beaming, and he looked rather like the pictures Tenniel used to draw of the Cheshire Cat.

He went back to Howard's office, and there he got the shock of his life. For Howard and Burton were both there, looking rather serious, and so were Sam Dwight and John Revell.

"Hello!" said Howard. "Oh—I'm sorry, Westcott. But you're out of a job again. We've just sold out to Revell's."

Bill whistled. Then he grinned—straight at John Revell.

"I should worry!" he said. "Jobs aren't so hard to get—even if you have to make them to order!"

"I've got one for you," said Revell in his growling voice. "You're an impudent young pup, but you're not a fool—which Johnson is, if he is my wife's cousin! Besides, Dwight says he'll resign unless you're his assistant. And so—"

Another delightful story by William Almon Wolff will appear in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Sindbad of Oakland Creek

The Woman in the Fog

by Frederick R. Bechdolt

A ROW of tall black cypresses suggested to Captain Dan the tale. We were taking an excursion on land, and walking through one of the suburbs east of Oakland, where mansions of a former generation stood, each sequestered within its own wide grounds like poverty-stricken old aristocrats who keep gloomily to themselves. The lofty hedge fronted one of these pretentious, though time-worn residences.

Captain Dan stopped short and looked for a while at the dark trees; his face took on a peculiar expression, as if mingled emotions were struggling for supremacy. At length he sighed and started on; when we had walked for perhaps a square, he spoke.

"It's strange," he said, "but it's a fact; when a man looks for trouble, he's pretty sure to find it." With which he lapsed into silence, and I made a mental note of the sentiment, then brought the talk to other subjects.

When we were back aboard the *Grampus,* and the supper was—to use his expression—"stowed away," we drew our chairs to the cabin stove. The weather had taken a turn for the worse now, and the rain was swishing along the deck above us, with the consequence that I accepted his hearty invitation to bunk for the night in one of the staterooms. For some time we smoked in quiet contentment, and I looked through the floating blue wreaths at him.

"That cypress hedge we passed in Fruitvale," said I, and paused. There was no need to go further.

"Ah, yes," he said, with a smile which, I noted, had a peculiar twist. "There was a row of them Spanish cypresses south of San Francisco, where the railroad comes out from the last tunnel; but the trees are gone now, and the house with them, long since. Long since! Aye; 'twas an old house when I was a young man. I never saw it but the one time and that was by night,—a dark night too; and the air in it was full of mildew and the smell of rotting wood. When next I passed the place, there was no house there, and the cypresses—they'd been chopped down; only the stumps were left to show the trees had been there. I mind the shade of them, makin' a black night still

blacker; and the lappin' of the tide on the stony beach hard by comes back to my ears this evenin'—me white-haired and"—he smiled humorously—"gettin' rheumatism in both legs! Ah, well! A man can't stay a young fool all his days, not even if he wanted to. Toss that sack of tobacco over here, lad."

He filled his pipe, and I, who had delayed more than one tale on former occasions by trying to force matters, repressed my eagerness, feigning absorption over the filling of my own brier. Captain Dan puffed until the bowl's contents were glowing and the blue cloud around him was thick as a September fog off the Heads. At length he looked down at his hands and slowly doubled one large fist; he lifted it, scanned the knuckles and lowered it once more until it rested on his knee. "I was handy with my fists in them days," he said softly. "Aye! And quick to use them—quick and anxious for the chance. A young man is forever huntin' trouble." Whereat he leaned back and spun the yarn from the beginning.

YE mind the time I went to Shanghai with a Chinaman's head in a basket, and came back to San Francisco with a thousand dollars in my pocket for makin' the v'y'ge? Well, there were weeks ahead of me before the *Grampus* would sail to Bering and the Arctic for the whalin', and I put in the time ashore as best I could. In those days the city used to be livelier in the neighborhood north of Market and east of Kearney than it is now. There was the Barbary Coast, which *was* the Barbary Coast then and no nonsense about it, as many a seaman knew when he woke up with his pockets inside out and his head stove in; and there was the shippin' offices and the chandlers and the customhouse. I used to hang out in the Bank Exchange saloon where skippers and mates and merchants and bankers and brokers did their drinkin'; the buildin' still stands within two blocks of the Hall o' Justice. 'Twas there I struck up a friendship with Bob Green.

He was in the customs service, a dark-eyed fellow, big as me and likable; plumb full of ginger, ambitious as they make 'em. When we'd got to know each other, we made up our minds to room together; and from then on, after his office hours were over, we were always in each other's company—no closer chums in the port than us two. I mind now how closemouthed he was about his work; he never used to tell me even what deals he had on hand; but otherwise he was as free-hearted as they make 'em.

We'd grown so used to each other's company that it seemed queer to be alone; and I was alone the evenin' when this thing began to happen—standin' on the step of the side door to the Bank Exchange saloon and wonderin' what on earth I was goin' to do with myself for the next four hours.

'Twas my last night in port, the *Grampus* was to sail next day, and there'd be no more city and no more street-lamps and no more fun for two years—just the cold gray sea, snow, ice-floes and greasy foremast hands and the rough-necks in the steerage. Bob and I'd agreed to spend the evenin' together at the theater, with a supper afterward and a bottle of wine between us. I'd been waitin' for him in the saloon, and he came in at last in a great hurry, to tell me 'twas all off with our good time.

"I'VE got something big on," says he, "and 'twill take me till after eleven to finish it." I could see that he was all excited and mysterious, and it made me sore that he should have joy at breakin' off our engagement. "But I'll meet ye here at midnight sure," he says, "and we'll have the supper together, Dan." Some one opened the side door just then, and he whipped a look over his shoulder. There was a big wide-shouldered man standin' on the step. "There now," says Bob, "here's a man I want to see."

With that he left me. He passed his arm through the big man's, and they walked down the street together, Bob talkin' into his ear. There was something about the fellow which told me he wasn't as keen for this deal as Bob. Well, neither was I keen about it, for

that matter. It had left me stranded, without a thing ahead of me till I'd meet him again here at midnight. I went out through the side door and stood lookin' up and down the street, wonderin' what I'd find to amuse myself in the way of excitement.

A man's last night in port is no ordinary night, ye see, lad; and I did want something to remember San Francisco by The idee of puttin' in the time walkin' the streets didn't make a hit with me; and neither did the idee of goin' alone to the theater. I was not one of them that can find pleasure standin' in front of a bar and makin' new friends over the liquor; and the Barbary Coast, with its thieves and painted dance-hall women and its fights and drunken sailors, never had looked good to me. That's one trouble about keepin' reasonably sober; ye can't find your fun on tap at so much a glass.

So I stood there on the step and let my eyes wander up and down the street and tried my best to think of some way to put in the time which would be pleasant, and cursed Bob for havin' found some business which had spoiled the evenin' for me. As I was gettin' good and sore at the world in general, a hack with its curtains drawn pulled up alongside the curb. The driver did not stop to tie, but wrapped the reins round his whipstock and jumped down; he came toward the door.

I stood aside to let him pass, thinkin' he was goin' in; but he stopped in front of me, looked up and down the block and handed me a slip of paper folded small.

Thinks I: "'Tis word from Bob tellin' me where to meet him; he's changed his mind about that business of his." But when I opened the note, I saw 'twas written in a woman's hand.

"I am in danger. Hurry."

THAT was all there was of it—just those five words—no address and no name signed. "Who's this for?" says I, but the hackman had gone back to his seat and had the reins in his hand. I glanced down again at the note. Under the light that was over the doorway I could see that whoever had written it had been in a deal of haste; and now I got the fancy that I could see her, white-faced and frightened, settin' down her message. "Are ye comin', sir?" says the hackman.

"Sure," says I. Ye know how it is when ye're young. I went to the hack and got in. The driver watched me, with his red face as wooden as a ship's figgerhead: a San Francisco hackman in those days took everything as plain business from weddin' parties to murders, and this one was the regular breed. I slammed the door behind me; he whipped up his horses, and we were off under all sail before I'd settled down in the seat. Thinks I: "After all, the city's goin' to be good to me." I raised one of the curtains a bit and watched the streets as we went through them, up to Kearney, down Kearney to Market, out Market and on into the Mission, down old San Bruno Road—'twas gettin' to be a long cruise, and I wondered how much further 'twas goin' to take me, anyhow.

We'd traveled a good distance south of the city and was out in the lonely hills beyond Colma when the hack turned into a side road. This was heavy and full of ruts, and ridin' in the closed carriage was like a sea v'y'ge in stormy weather. I settled down and braced myself to keep from bein' tossed against the upper deck; and every once in a while I could hear the hackman swearin' at his horses. The fog was comin' in now, thick and swift—the way it does sometimes down there; and the two lamps made little blurs of yellow in it. Ye couldn't see five feet before ye. There was nearly an hour of this, and then of a sudden the driver pulled up.

"All right in there," says he very quiet.

I opened the door and got out in a mud puddle. 'Twas black dark. I hadn't the least idee where I could be. And as I was standin' there peerin' into the fog and the night, waitin' for the driver to tell me where I was to go, anyhow, he begun backin'. In a trice he'd turned the team and was makin' off down the road. I called after him, but I might as well have saved my breath; I heard the whip crack once and the sloshing of the horses'

hoofs in the pools of water. The darkness closed in on me.

I STARTED to run after the carriage; but when I'd taken two or three steps and nearly capsized over a hummock of dried mud, I fetched up. No use of doin' that. I thought of the note. Mebbe it was a trap to pull me on for robbers; I'd heard of the like before; but there was no sign of robbers nor anyone else here. I faced about and stared ahead; and then a light showed through the blackness—just a little blur that died away as the fog grew thicker again, but enough to show there was a house near by.

Mebbe then the note was right, after all: "I am in danger. Hurry." As I thought it over, it came to me that this neighborhood was a likely enough place for anybody to be in danger. And if there was a woman here, with anyone trying to do her ill, why, Lord help her! She could scream her head off, for all the good 'twould do her.

With that thought I started on in the direction where the light had showed. 'Twas evil goin'—ruts, chuckholes, pools of water, sticky mud and lumps to trip a man. I navigated slowly, takin' my bearin's by dead reckonin' and stoppin' every so often to listen. I'd gone perhaps a hundred yards when I thought I heard voices. I fetched up with a round turn and stood listenin'.

There was a matter of two minutes went by without any sound but the lap-lap of water somewhere; and now I got the smell of the tide and knew that I was som'er's near the bay, south of the city. Then, as I stood there without either sound or motion, a voice came sharp and plain, an ugly voice with a rasp in it that made me sort of tingle, like a knife will when a man scrapes the edge against steel.

"Ye're wrong, mate, that wasn't anyone," says the voice. And then another answered: "I'd swear I heard some one walkin', and ye said yourself there was a call, awhile ago. S'posing she had managed to send out word for help?"

I stiffened where I stood. It began to look like the note was tellin' the truth, after all.

"Help be damned!" says the first one who'd spoke. "We got her." And then he cursed her in a way that made my blood run hotter and my fists double. "There's three more of us down by the house, aint there? She can't slip away now if she suspicioned anything. *She's* gone—that's what *she* is."

WELL, if I'd had any doubts about the manner of their intentions, what the other one answered would of settled them. "Ye-es," says he,—he had a nasty drawl,—"we'll put her away, all right. A good haul too, I call it. Sa-ay, did ye see the way I soaked that fellow with the black-jack when he started to yell?"

They both laughed then, but the man with the drawl stopped sudden-like. "Stow that," says he. "Ye can't tell who might be prowlin' round here in this fog. Why don't they break in? That window on the south side aint caught. Once in, they can get their hands on her and shut off her wind before she squawks."

"She'll make a fight for it," says the raspin' voice.

"Aye," says the drawl, "and ye'd fight too, if ye was in her fix, wouldn't ye? But she's a woman—and alone. It's all off with her." He chuckled, and the sound of it was like a stone droppin' into a well; it made my blood run cold. "If only they do the thing quiet—that's the word. Slip a towel over her face—from behind if they get the chanst. Then handle her as slow as they please and get the stuff away into the boat. Why don't they tip us a signal? This fog is soakin' into my bones."

By this time I was able to see a little better, and the fog was liftin'; the light from the house showed again. I knew that this pair of cutthroats would be sure to make me out if I stood here any longer; so I dropped on my belly.

Gradually I got the lay of things. I was out in front of a row of lofty cypress trees,—'twas them that had helped to hide the light in the house while I was comin' down the road,—just such a row of trees as them we passed this afternoon, lad. Before me, there was a tall fence, and there, in a wide old-

fashioned gateway, the two were talkin'. Beyond the gateway there was some sort of a wide walk or driveway that seemed—so far as I could make out—to run straight to the front door. The house showed black against the sky behind it, and the blur of yellow light came from one of the side windows on the upper floor.

When I had made out all these things, I did a little figgerin'. Judging by the sound of the wash, the bay must lie behind the house some hundred feet or so; and these two had spoken of a boat. Now, with them on this side, it seemed as if the others would most likely be watchin' elsewhere; and once I passed these thugs, I'd have a clear coast so far as the front of the house was concerned—as long as I kept quiet. If I got that far, I could let the rest go and take things as they came, with the idee of gettin' into the place as quick as possible. All this ran through my head, and I set my mind on passin' this pair without raisin' a disturbance.

THERE had been a second or two when I'd argued whether it might not be better to go and look for help, but there was no sign of dwellin'-place exceptin' the light in the house; and in this black darkness 'twas certain I'd only lose my way. Whilst I was flounderin' around and fallin' into mud puddles, the gang here would finish their dirty business and no one a bit the wiser. No, I must get away with it alone.

Well, I was here against odds and without a sign of a weapon of any kind —nothin' larger than a penknife. And she—whoever she might be—was in that upstairs room, surrounded by this gang, whose intentions was ugly enough to make a man's blood crawl. There was one thing for it—I must get into that house before the others did, and help her as best I could. So, though my fingers itched to get a good grip on the throats of those two by the gate, I made up my mind to slip past them —fightin' enough ahead of me, without usin' up my strength now.

There was a ditch beside the road; 'twas half full of water from the last rain, and for that matter, from rains before that; it smelled to heaven as I crawled through it. I never wanted so bad to move fast, and I do not think I ever moved slower than I did then, with the stink of blue mud and frog's broth in my nose, and me knowin' that the least little sound would bring them two down on top of me. I thought of that black-jack one of them had mentioned, and the thought made the back of my head tingle.

Once I splashed my hand ever so little. "What's that?" says a voice. "A frog, ye fool!" says the other. One foot at a time. I crept away from them, down in the ditch, alongside the fence, until I'd gotten far enough to be reasonably safe, to my way of thinkin'. Then I wormed along on my belly close to the palings, and thanked God when I found a place where two pickets was missin'. I was a bulky young devil in them days and 'twas a tight fit. I scrubbed a lot of the blue mud off of my new clothes in gettin' through; that was one comfort—but I scraped a lot of good hide along with it by way of payin'.

I got in the yard at last, and I crouched there, under the cypresses; 'twas dark as the blackest night that ever happened, but I could make out the two by the gate, huddled up close together; their voices came to me, faint so that I couldn't tell what they were mutterin' about. I did not waste any time speculatin' over it but went—on my hands and knees at first; then I ran, bent double. There were a lot of bushes,—the place must have been a garden in its day, with all sorts of shrubbery,—and I fetched up against one with a noise that brought a man running from the further side of the house. I could make out the big bulk of him in the fog. "Who's there?" says he in a half-whisper.

I LAID where I had dropped, although the shrub had turned out to be a rosebush, and 'twas punishin' me hard. He poked around in the branches with a club, then stood there listening for a long time. I bided until he'd gone away; then I crawled to the front porch. It was as I'd figgered: they'd left the pair at the gate to guard this end of the

place, and the others were on the sides. So long as they didn't see me from out there by the road, I was safe—unless I brought that big burly around again.

Now, the light that I'd seen from the road was on the north side of the house in the second story; and I was pretty certain that the woman would be up there. I crept over to one of the front windows and tried it carefully. 'Twas locked. Thinks I: "It aint so likely they're caught upstairs." And then I hit on the idee of the porch pillars; they were those old-fashioned fluted wooden posts made to look like stone,—plastered with sand. Couldn't of contrived 'em better for climbin'. I thanked my luck for bein' born and bred a seafarin' man and swarmed up the nearest one. There was a low railin' on the upper deck, and when I'd dropped behind it, I saw a big French window dead ahead. It was latched, but the bolt which held it at the bottom was drawn, and I forced the two sashes open without any more noise than a bit of a creak. I was inside in a dark hallway.

'Twas there I got the smell of dry rot and mildew; the air was heavy with it—plain enough that the old place was slowly goin' to pieces. As I stood gettin' my bearin's, I could hear the scuttlin' of the rats behind the walls, with now and then a squeak; that was all the livin' sound there was. I began to wonder if mebbe I hadn't been too late, but I caught sight of a faint line of lamplight oozin' from under a door halfway down the corridor. I walked to it, tryin' my best to tread softly like a burglar, and rapped gently.

There was no answer, and no one seemed to be stirrin' inside. I had no more time to lose with bein' polite; I turned the knob and flung the door open.

A WOMAN was sittin' there beside a little table on which a cheap lamp was burnin'. Her hands was grippin' the seat of the plain wooden chair, and her cheeks was as white as chalk. She faced me with her eyes like two black slits; and the fear that she was in gave her a wild, fierce look like an animal that has been caught in a trap. She was a little thing—so little I could of held her out in one hand,—and well dressed—a bit too well dressed; there was a flashiness about her bright silks as I look back on it. But she was beautiful—leastwise she seemed that way to me then—beautiful in spite of the whiteness of her face and the ugly fright in her narrow eyes, and in spite of the lines around her red lips,—lines that said she had seen her sorrows and her joys. I think a face like that—a woman's face showin' experience—is more liable than any other to set a lad's blood racin' to his head. This one did mine. I stepped inside and closed the door. I must of been a hard sight with all my mud and scratches. She had not said a word, but now I saw her right hand slippin' along the table-edge toward a revolver that laid beside the lamp.

"Don't be afraid," I whispered. "I've come to help."

She stopped gropin' for the pistol and jumped to her feet, still with that fierce suspicion in her eyes; but before she could speak, I raised my hand. "They're outside there now—five of them."

"Yes?" she whispered, and I saw a puzzled scowl between her straight black eyebrows. "And *you've* come to help?"

"I got your note," I told her.

"*You* got it!" She started back from me as if I'd made a grab for her. Her voice had gone hoarse now.

I nodded and,—because I wanted to put my best foot foremost as much as because of the danger we stood in, —I whispered the story from start to finish. When I got to the place where the hackman handed me the note, I saw her eyes grow wilder and fix themselves on me curiously. Then gradually they grew softer, and she breathed deeper, as if a load was off her mind. "Then you're not with *them*," she says when I got done.

"With them!" says I. "Do I look it?"

SHE smiled just a little. "They've been watchin' since dusk," she whispered and came closer to me. "I'd left a hackman waitin' for me on San

Bruno Road, and I managed to get the note to him by a boy who was duck-huntin' on the beach, without their discoverin' it." She stopped suddenly; and then she came beside me, so that I could feel the softness of her.

I wanted to know more—who was the note for? How had she come to this rotting old house? Why did they want to harm her? But I heard a sound on the first floor and knew there was no more time now for talkin'.

"Have no fear," says I. "I'll get ye out of this."

The man downstairs was openin' a window. I could hear the old sash-weights rattlin', for all the care he was usin'.

"Come," I whispered; she picked up the revolver and followed me out into the hall. I closed the door, and as we stood there in the darkness, she slipped her little hand into mine, grippin' my palm with her warm fingers. Man! The blood ran to my head. I'd of fought off a regiment then with the knowledge that I was goin' to die, and been cheerful.

(Captain Dan paused. "Where's the matches?" he asked, and when I had passed them: "I was in my first twenties," he said apologetically.

("Yes, yes," I told him, "I understand. Spin!"

(He smiled indulgently, and when he had gotten his pipe going, he resumed.)

A woman has a way with her. 'Tis a fact that while we stood there, I wanted to slip my arm around her, to draw her to my side and hold her there, protectin' her. She made no sound, no movement, but I felt that—for this time while we were fightin' it out against these cutthroats—there was only two of us who counted in the whole world. And, somehow, I felt that she had that feelin' too. But I just stood there beside her with her little fingers pressin' my hand and listened.

THERE came a step down there below us, and then another. 'Twas very slow and hardly enough sound to make out. Then everything was quiet as the grave once more. I'd begun to think he was never goin' to come further, when I heard a stair creak, halfway up the flight—plain enough that he was comin' in his stockin' feet. I put her behind me, very gently, and I slipped over close to the wall. The stair-landing was within six feet of me. I stood there waitin' with my arms half doubled, my hands open for the fellow's throat. It had to be done quiet.

There was another creak, and I could hear his coat-sleeve scraping against the wall. I did not breathe. His head and shoulders came into sight, a black blur in the darkness of the hall! It wasn't like anything solid, but like a part of the night itself. Then he was there in front of me. I let him take another step. If I'd had a knife, I think I would have used it. I do not know, but I think so. But I'd no weapon—only my two hands. He finished that step, and I heard him draw in his breath sudden-like. I knew he'd found me.

Before he could make a sound,—before he could move,—I had my hands squeezin' his windpipe. I felt my nails scrapin' the skin from his face as I made that grab. He was as hard as iron and big as I was. No doubt about it that if I'd given him a fair show, he'd of made things most interestin' for me—mebbe he'd of got the best of it. But I wasn't wastin' chances with fair fightin'; I sunk my fingers deeper in, and while he lurched back and forth tryin' his best to shake me off of him, I heard the click of that revolver of hers. "Don't shoot," I whispered. I gripped harder, until I felt his knees weakenin', and I let him down on the floor.

The woman was behind me as I knelt on him; I felt her hand by my cheek. "Here," she whispered. "Quick, take this." She had a thin silk scarf—I'd seen it round her neck when I opened the door and went into that room. I snatched it from her as I packed my own handkerchief into his mouth; then I tied the wrap around his legs. I could hear him gaspin' for breath with a crowing sound as we left him.

HAND in hand we crept down the stairs through the blackness; her fingers gripped mine; and once, when she was uncertain in her footin', she leaned against me with her soft

warm breath brushin' my cheek. I am old now, but I can remember how my blood raced then. We reached the first floor and fetched up.

"Where now?" she whispered, and it seemed to me that I could feel her lips against my ear. It made me want to charge the whole bunch of them.

"There's a boat on the beach," I told her; "I heard 'em say so. If we could get to it— But we'll have to fight."

She slipped her hand up my arm, and her fingers pressed it hard. "Will you?" was all she said.

"Come," I told her.

We slunk down the hallway toward the rear and passed through a room; I got the smell of an old drain, and I think it must have been the kitchen. There was a window openin' toward the beach, and as we stopped in the middle of the floor, I could see things on the outside, where the darkness was not so smotherin' thick as 'twas here. The bay was gleamin' in little streaks with the movement of the ripples; and there was one or two small sheds that showed against the sky-line. More than that I could not see, but I heard some one walkin'. The footsteps sounded quite plain, and then there came a voice: "Say, mate, I guess he's got her."

"Stow that," says another voice. "Lay quiet."

As near as I could locate them by the sound, they were both of them on the north side of the house, the one who'd spoken first, nearest the beach, the other, some distance toward the front.

"There's a key in that back door," she whispered to me.

As we went on tiptoes, I laid my hand on a bit of timber—'twas a piece of two-by-four, rough lumber, as near as I could judge by the feel of it, and about three feet long. I picked it up, and very softly, turned the key.

"Now," I whispered to her, "if it comes that they get me, you use that pistol. Not till then, mind." With that I opened the door, and we slipped outside.

THERE was a narrow porch; we crossed it without a sound and reached the yard. "Run for it!" I said and gripped her hand. We ran through the night, with the ripple of the tide on the stones dead ahead of us.

A voice sounded behind us—no more of that quiet mutterin' now, either. It came in a shout: "Who's there?" And then sounded the poundin' of feet—two pairs of them. I could hear her sobbin' with fear, and a moment later she stumbled. My own foot struck a rock at the same minute. We went down together. When I got up as far as my knees, the nighest of those two villains was within ten feet of me. I waited for him, and I saw him halt; he couldn't see us down there close to the earth. He was swearin' like a pirate. Suddenly he came on again, and I leaped to my feet, swingin' that two-by-four over my head. Before he had a chance to raise his hand, it had come down on him, and he dropped.

Som'er's behind him the other was racing toward us. I pulled the woman to me; and there was no word said between us, but we ran again. I think the second man must have tumbled over the body of his companion, for I heard a thumping as if he'd fallen, and he let out a yell. I did not wait for more, but only prayed they'd do no shootin', and we reached the stony beach a minute after.

"The boat," says I. For the life of me I could not make out anything but the blur of the land meetin' the water and the little lines of light where the ripples were breakin'. What seemed real was not real, and where there seemed to be nothin', I'd find myself fetchin' up against a rock. I ran to and fro, stoopin' low with my hands out, and back there by the house there was a clatter of voices. Some one was bustin' in a window; it gave way with a smash and a jingle; and there came the racket of heels on the stairs.

Then the woman's voice called through the darkness very softly: "This way. I have it." I groped through the blackness to her, and she took my hand in hers and guided it to the gunwale of a little skiff. 'Twas well up out of the water. I heard a terrible yell in the house, and a voice bawled: "Out, ye lubbers — after them — down by the water!" I fairly picked up that skiff

and hove it into the bay; and when I felt it afloat, I lifted the woman in my arms; she was very light,—a feather-weight,—and there was that soft warmth about her that made my breath come deep as I set her down. I gave one final shove and climbed into the craft myself.

THE grounds about the old house were all aflare with lights; and as I pulled on the oars, I saw them sweepin' down toward the beach like so many big fire-flies. I laughed. "We're safe now," I said aloud, and I made the skiff jump through the water. Five minutes later the fog had closed round us, and for all that showed now of the place, there might as well have been no house, nor men with lanterns. It was as if we'd drifted out of one world into another.

Now I had set her down—in my hurry—toward the bow, and she was not only where her weight made it harder rowin', but she was behind my back, which put her where I could not see the slightest sign of her; and this was a sore trial to me. But there was no use of riskin' capsizin' by askin' her to shift places through the darkness in this cranky craft. So I pulled on. But it seemed to me then as if she might of said something. Here I was, riskin' my life to pull her out of danger—me that had never clapped eyes on her before, and she, with no word for my ears. I rowed on for a considerable ways, and finally:

"Where," says I, "would ye like to go now?"

A lad cannot hide his feelin's, and mine must of showed in my voice, for I felt her little hand on my shoulder. "My friend," she says,—and now that she could talk without hushin' it, I got the richness of her voice,—"you've saved me from what I feared worse than death, and you came to me without knowin' aught of me only that I was in danger."

"I would know more," I told her, and the voice of me was chokin' with eagerness.

"Yes," she whispered in my ear, "when we are safe; then you may ask me how it came."

"It is not that I mean," I told her. "I do not care how the danger came to ye. It is you that I must know."

"But you shall hear it," she says. "And of course you'll know me then." And she laughed—the softness of that laugh made me drunk. Her hand was still resting on my shoulder. "But now we must get to the city."

"Yes," I told her; and I pulled harder on the oars.

WE'D gone perhaps a mile when I thought I heard the sound of row-locks som'er's behind us. I said no word but kept my ears open and pretty soon, through the blackness of the night and fog, the sound came once more. There was a boat back there, and two men were pullin'. She'd caught the noise by this time, and her fingers sunk into my arm. "Faster," she whispered.

They were comin' on—no doubt of it—overhaulin' us. I made the little skiff jump through the water; but there was no use. Once I heard their voices, and I knew that they as good as had us already.

A plan came to me in that moment: I changed our course out into the bay, and I gave two or three long strokes. Then I raised the oars out of the water. The tide was runnin' in the ebb; I knew the way the currents must set here—'twould be mighty certain to carry us further on the course I'd shaped. And now, as we drifted, I heard the other boat come closer, closer; then it passed us, and I could barely make out the blur of it, it was so near. I held my breath lest them in it should get sight of us, but they were lookin' ahead; we'd crossed their bows, and they were holdin' to their original course. A minute later they were out of sight, and the sounds of them came fainter.

I unshipped an oar and paddled gently eastward. As we were slippin' away, they discovered what had happened; for the noises of their boat stopped, exceptin' for a splash now and again when some one dropped his blade accidentally into the water. Afterward their oars began their thump-thumpin' in the locks once more; and I could tell that they were headin' on toward the city.

"Leave them go," I told her. "We'll follow, and there's plenty of landin'-places without their runnin' onto us."

"I am in your hands," she whispered; and my heart swelled up inside of me with the pride of it.

For pretty nigh a half-hour I paddled and drifted, and finally I pulled on the oars again. I was thankful that the tide was with me, for 'twas a long distance before we sighted the lights of the city, all blurred by the fog. I shaped my course for the wharves south of the old ferry slips, for I knew there'd be people about there, no matter what the hour; and she sat behind me, with one hand on my shoulder, but sayin' nothin'.

AT last we glided into the slip, and I saw a ladder leadin' up to the dock. I headed for it and held it while she climbed up; then I followed her. I came up over the stringer at the edge of the wharf just in time to see a big man come out of the blackness. "Now," says he in a hoarse voice, "I've got ye." And as his hand fell on her, she gave a faint scream.

I didn't wait, but landed on him—one swing. It lifted him clear off his feet, and he disappeared into the dark; a second later I heard the splash he made when he hit the water. I whirled and looked around—no one else in sight. They'd evidently come in ahead of us and split up, watchin' the different landin'-places.

"We're safe," I said, and turned to take her hand. She'd gone. I got one glimpse of her running into East Street. I rushed after her, but when I reached the cobblestones, she was nowhere in sight.

(Captain Dan paused and lighted his pipe, which had been cold for a long time. I was looking at him expectantly. He smiled wisely.

("Well?" I said.

(He chuckled and went on.)

I'd got into my room and made a change to dry clothes before I remembered my engagement with Bob Green. I hurried to the Bank Exchange saloon. He was not there, and I waited for a long time. Finally I went home again.

Bob was in the room now, and he was a sad sight; one eye was shut—I never saw a blacker; his clothes were drippin' salt-water all over the carpet, and his teeth were chatterin' as if he had ague.

"What on earth!" says I.

"Dan," says he,—and his voice cuts me to the heart now when I remember it,—" 'twas the biggest haul in the history of the customs service, or 'twould of been but—" He stopped; his voice was very hoarse, and he made hard work of talkin'. In a minute he went on: "We got three of 'em—worst opium-smuggling gang on the Pacific Coast; but the other—the woman that's been head of the smugglin' ring for two years now—" He choked. "My throat," says he. "That ruffian almost throttled me. And see where he clawed my face!"

I sat down in a chair because my legs was gettin' weak. "Was that one of the gang ye took away from the side door of the Bank Exchange saloon?" I asked. He nodded, and when he was able to speak again: "But it was the woman we wanted most. The brains of the bunch, she was. And we had her cornered. We thought she was alone, Dan; but she'd a fellow with her all the time—a big burly thug. He nearly drowned me—knocked me into the bay."

I don't know what else he did say. I know he did a deal of swearin'. But I was sickish, and I felt that any more would be too much for me. I didn't listen.

"THE SHIP THAT CAME BACK"

NEXT month we will publish what we feel is the most fascinating of Mr. Bechdolt's stories of "Sindbad of Oakland Creek." When you read "The Ship That Came Back" (in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale February 1st), you will experience the real thrill of keen adventure.

Firebrand Trevison

A Novel of the West

by Charles Alden Seltzer

(Events of the First Installment:)

A BOOM had come to the little Western town of Manti. The railroad had reached it; close on the railroad's heels came Eastern capital with a plan for a big irrigation project. And to Manti there also came one Corrigan, an Eastern crook, with a bold plan for a gigantic land-theft. But there were real he men in Manti—in particular a cattle-man known as Firebrand Trevison. So between Corrigan and Trevison war was soon declared.

It began the day Rosalind Benham, daughter of J. C. Benham, the railroad president, visited Manti in his private car under the chaperonage of her Aunt Agatha. Trevison was putting his pet horse through its paces for the benefit of some friends when Corrigan saw Rosalind's admiration, and as he was a suitor for her, a quick jealousy prompted him to a jeering remark directed at Trevison. The result was a terrific fight in the back room of the bank; Trevison would have won had not the banker Braman, one of Corrigan's henchmen, treacherously tripped him from behind; even so he had Corrigan whipped to a standstill when the fight was stopped.

Out of revenge Corrigan tore up the check which had been made out to pay Trevison for the railroad's right-of-way through Trevison's land. His superior officer, President Benham, however, who was ignorant of Corrigan's underhanded plans, overruled him in this and sent Rosalind with the money to pay Trevison. In this way she became acquainted with Firebrand; and eventually she learned that he was a college-bred Easterner, that his real name was Trevison Brandon and that he had come West to make his fortune after his father had cut him off because of his wildness.

Meanwhile, Corrigan was maturing his plot. He had arranged for the presence of one Judge Lindman in Manti—a man whom he held in his power. The Judge was to declare land-titles invalid; and Corrigan, aided also by Braman, was to gain possession of much valuable property in this way. They reckoned without Firebrand Trevison, however.

(The story follows in detail:)

CHAPTER VIII

The Chaos of Creation

THE West saw many boom-towns. They followed in the wake of gold strikes; they grew mushroomlike, overnight—garish husks of squalor, hardy,

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atingle with extravagant hopes. A few lived to become substantial cities buzzing with the American spirit.

Manti was one of those destined to live. It was a boom-town with material reasons for substantial growth. Behind it were the resources of a railroad company which would anticipate the development of a section of country bigger than a dozen Old World states, and men with brains keen enough to realize the commercial possibilities it held. It had Corrigan for an advance-agent—big, confident, magnetic, energetic, suave, smooth.

Manti had awaited his coming; he was the magic force, the fulfillment of the rumored promise. He had stayed away for three weeks, following his departure on the special car after bringing Judge Lindman, and when he stepped off the car again at the end of that time, Manti was "humming" as he had predicted.

Since the day Miss Benham had viewed the town from the window of the private car, Manti had added more than a hundred buildings to its total. They were not attractive; and they were ludicrous in their pitiful masquerade of substantial types. Here and there a three-story structure reared aloft, sheathed with galvanized iron—a garish aristocrat seemingly conscious of its superiority, brazen in its bid for attention; more modest buildings seemed dwarfed, humiliated, squatting sullenly and enviously. There were hotels, rooming-houses and boarding-houses, stores, dwellings, saloons. But they were pulsating with life, electric, eager, expectant. Taking advantage of the scarcity of buildings, an enterprising citizen had erected tents in rows on the street line; he charged an enormous rent—and did a capacity business.

"A hundred came in on the last train," complained the overworked station agent. "Gawd knows what they all expect to do here!"

CORRIGAN had kept his promise to build Judge Lindman a courthouse. It was a flat-roofed structure one story high, wedged between a saloon and Braman's bank-building. A sign in the front window of Braman's bank announced that Jefferson Corrigan, agent of the Land & Improvement Company, of New York, had office-space within, but on the morning of the day following his return to Manti, Corrigan was seated at one side of a flat-topped desk in the courthouse, talking with Judge Lindman, who sat at the other side.

"Got them all transcribed?" asked Corrigan.

The Judge drew a thin ledger from his desk and passed it over to Corrigan. As Corrigan turned the pages and his face lighted, the Judge's grew correspondingly troubled.

"All right," exulted Corrigan. "This purports to be an accurate and true record of all the land-transactions in this section from the special grant to the Midland Company down to date. It shows no intermediate owners from the Midland Company to the present claimants. As a document arraigning carelessness on the part of land-buyers it cannot be excelled. There isn't a present owner that has a legal leg to stand on!"

"There is only one weak point in your case," said the Judge, and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction, which he concealed by bowing his head. "It is that since these records show no sale of its property by the Midland Company, the Midland Company can come forward and reëstablish their title."

Corrigan laughed and flipped a legal-looking paper in front of the Judge. The latter opened it and read, showing eagerness. He laid it down after reading, his hands trembling.

"It shows that the Midland Company —James Marchmont, president—transferred to Jefferson Corrigan, on a date prior to these other transactions, one hundred thousand acres of land here—the Midland Company's entire holdings. Why, man, it is forgery!"

"No," said Corrigan quietly. "James Marchmont is alive. He signed his name right where it is. He'll confirm it, too, for he happens to be in something of the fix that you are in. Therefore, there being no records of any sales on your books—as revised, of course—Jeff Corrigan is the legal possessor of one hundred thousand acres of land right in the heart of what is going to be the boom-section of the West!" He chuckled, lighted a cigar, leaned back in his chair and looked at the Judge. "All you have to do now is to enter that transaction on your records."

"You don't expect the present owners to yield their titles without a fight, do you?" asked the Judge. He spoke breathlessly.

CORRIGAN grunted. "Sure, they'll fight. But they'll lose. I've got them. I've got the power—the courts, the law—behind me. I've got them, and I'll squeeze them. It means a mint of money, man. It will make you. It's the biggest thing any man ever attempted to pull off in this country!"

"Yes, it's big," groaned the Judge. "It's stupendous! It's frightful! Why, man, if anything goes wrong, it would mean—" He paused and shivered.

Corrigan smiled contemptuously. "Where's the original record?" he asked.

"I destroyed it," said the Judge. He did not look at Corrigan.

"How?" demanded the latter.

"Burned it."

"Good." Corrigan rubbed his palms together. "It's too soon to start anything. Things are booming, and some of these owners will be trying to sell. Hold them off—don't record anything. Give them any excuse that comes to your mind. Have you heard from Washington?"

"The establishment of the court here has been confirmed."

"Quick work!" laughed Corrigan. He got up, murmuring something about having to take care of some leases. When he turned, it was to start and stand rigid, his jaws set, his face pale. A man stood in the open doorway—a man of about fifty, apparently, furtive-eyed, slightly shabby, though with an atmosphere about him that hinted of past dignity of carriage.

"Jim Marchmont!" said Corrigan. He stepped forward threateningly, his face dark with wrath. Without speaking another word, he seized the newcomer by the coat-collar, snapping his head back savagely, and dragged him back of a wooden partition. Concealed there from any of the curious in the street, he jammed Marchmont against the wall of the building, held him there with one hand and stuck a huge fist into his face.

"What in blazes are you doing here?" he demanded. "Come clean, or I'll tear you apart!"

THE other laughed, but there was no mirth in it; his thin lips were curved queerly, and were stiff and white. "Don't get excited, Jeff," he said. "It wont be healthy."

Corrigan felt something hard and

cold against his shirt-front. He knew it was a pistol, and he released his hold and stepped back.

"Speaking of coming clean!" said Marchmont. "You crossed me. You told me you were going to sell the Midland land to two big ranch-owners. I find that you are going to cut it up into lots and make big money—loads of it. You handed me a measly thousand. You stand to make millions. I want my divvy."

"You've got your nerve," scoffed Corrigan. "You got your bit when you sold the Midland before. You're a self-convicted crook, and if you make a peep out here, I'll send you over the road for a thousand years!"

"Another thousand now," said Marchmont, "and ten more when you commence to cash in. Otherwise, a thousand years or not, I'll start yapping here and queer your game."

Corrigan's lips were in an ugly pout. For an instant it seemed he was going to defy his visitor. Then without a word to him he stepped around the partition, walked out of the door and entered the bank. A few minutes later he passed a bundle of greenbacks to Marchmont and escorted him to the front door, where he stood watching, his face unpleasant, until Marchmont vanished into one of the saloons.

"That settles *you,* you fool!" he said, then.

He stepped down into the street and went into the bank. Braman fawned on him, smirking insincerely—he had not forgiven Corrigan's overbearing treatment. Corrigan wasted no words.

"Who's the best gunman in this section?" he asked.

Braman reflected a minute. "Clay Levins," he said finally.

"Can you find him?"

"Why, he's in town to-day; I saw him not more than fifteen minutes ago, going into the Elk!"

"Find him and bring him here—by the back way," directed Corrigan.

BRAMAN went out, wondering. A few minutes later he returned, coming in at the front door, smiling with triumph. Shortly afterward Corrigan was opening the rear door on a tall, slender man of thirty-five, with a thin face, a mouth that drooped at the corners and alert, furtive eyes. He wore a heavy pistol at his right hip—low, the bottom of the holster tied to the leather chaps; and as Corrigan closed the door, he noted that the man's right hand lingered close to the butt of the weapon.

"That's all right," said Corrigan; "you're perfectly safe here."

He talked in low tones to the man, so that Braman could not hear. Levins departed shortly afterwards, grinning crookedly, tucking a piece of paper into a pocket upon which Corrigan had transcribed something that had been written on the cuff of his sleeve. Corrigan went to his desk and busied himself with some papers.

Over in the courthouse, Judge Lindman took from a drawer in his desk a thin ledger—a duplicate of the one he had shown Corrigan—and going to the rear of the room, opened the door of an iron safe, stuck the ledger out of sight under a mass of legal papers.

WHEN Marchmont left Corrigan, he went straight to the Plaza, where he ordered a lunch and ate heartily. After finishing his meal, he emerged from the saloon and stood near one of the front windows. One of the hundred-dollar bills that Corrigan had given him he had broken in the Plaza, getting bills of small denomination in change, and in his trousers pocket was a roll that bulked comfortably in his hand. The feel of it made him tingle with satisfaction; except for the other thousand that Corrigan had given him some months ago, it was the only money he had had for a long time. He knew he should take the next train out of Manti—that he had done a hazardous thing in baiting Corrigan; but he was lonesome and yearned for the touch and voice of the crowds that thronged in and out of the saloon and the stores, and presently he joined them, wandering from saloon to saloon, drinking occasionally, his content and satisfaction increasing in proportion to the quantity of liquor he drank.

And then, at about three o'clock, in the barroom of the Plaza he heard a

discordant voice at his elbow. He saw men crowding, jostling one another to get away from the spot where he stood. It made him feel that he was the center of interest, and he wheeled, staggering a little,—for he had drunk much more than he had intended,—to see what had happened. He saw Clay Levins standing close to him, his thin lips in a cruel curve, his eyes narrowed and glittering, his body in a suggestive crouch. The silence that had suddenly descended smote Marchmont's ears like a momentary deafness, and he looked foolishly around him, uncertain, puzzled. Levins' voice shocked him, sobered him, whitened his face:

"Fork over that coin you lifted from me in the Elk, you light-fingered—" said Levins.

Marchmont divined the truth now. He made his second mistake of the day. He allowed a flash of rage to trick him into reaching for his pistol. He got it into his hand and almost out of the pocket before Levins' first bullet struck him; but before he could draw it entirely out, the second savage bark of the gun in Levins' hand shattered the stillness of the room. Soundlessly, his face wreathed in a grin of hideous satire, Marchmont sank to the floor and stretched out on his back.

BEFORE the body was still, Levins had drawn out the bills that had reposed in his victim's pocket. Crumpling them in his hand, he walked to the bar and tossed them to the barkeeper.

"Look at 'em," he directed. "I'm provin' they're mine. Good thing I got the numbers on 'em." While the crowd jostled and crushed about him, he read the numbers from the paper Corrigan had given him, grinning coldly as the barkeeper confirmed them. A deputy sheriff elbowed his way through the press to Levins' side, and the gunman spoke to him, lightly: "I reckon everybody saw him reach for his gun when I told him to fork the coin over," he said, indicating his victim. "So you aint got nothin' on me. But if you're figgerin' that the coin aint mine, why I reckon a guy named Corrigan will back up my play."

The deputy took him at his word. They found Corrigan at his desk in the bank-building.

"Sure," he said when the deputy had told his story. "I paid Levins the money this morning. Is it necessary for you to know what for? No? Well, it seems that the pickpocket got just what he deserved." He offered the deputy a cigar, and the latter went out, satisfied.

Later, Corrigan looked appraisingly at Levins, who still graced the office.

"That was rather an easy job," he said. "Marchmont was slow with a gun. With a faster man, a man, say,"—he appeared to meditate,—"like Trevison, for instance, you'd have to be pretty careful—"

"Trevison's my friend," grinned Levins coldly as he got to his feet. "There's nothin' doin', there—understand? Get it out of your brain-box, for if anything happens to Firebrand, I'll perforate you sure as hell!"

He stalked out of the office, leaving Corrigan looking after him frowningly.

CHAPTER IX

Straight Talk

TEN years of lonesomeness, of separation from all the things he held dear, had brought into Trevison's heart a great longing. The appearance of Miss Benham at Manti had thrilled him. For ten years he had seen no Eastern woman, and at sight of her the old hunger of the soul became acute in him, aroused in him a passionate worship that made his blood run riot.

During the three weeks of her stay at Blakeley's they had been much together. Rosalind had accepted his companionship as a matter of course. He had told her many things about his past, and was telling her many more things, as they sat to-day on an isolated excrescence of sand and rock and bunch grass surrounded by a sea of sage. From where they sat they could see Manti—Manti, alive, athrob, its newly come hundreds busy as ants with their different pursuits.

Trevison's broken wrist had healed. His hatred of Corrigan had been kept

alive by a recollection of the fight, by a memory of the big man's quickness to take advantage of the banker's foul trick. Jealousy of the big man he would not have admitted; but something swelled his chest when he thought of Corrigan's coming West in the same car with the girl—a vague, gnawing something that made his teeth clench and his facial muscles cord.

Rosalind had not told him that she had recognized him, that during the ten years of his exile he had been her ideal; but she could close her eyes at this minute and imagine herself on the stair-landing at Hester Keyes' party, could feel the identical wave of thrilling admiration that had passed over her when her gaze had first rested on him. But her curiosity was keener than ever; in no other man of her acquaintance had she felt this intense interest.

"I remember your telling me the other day," she remarked, "that your men would have used their rifles, had the railroad company attempted to set men to work in the cut. I presume you must have given them orders to shoot. I can't understand you. You were raised in the East; your parents are wealthy; it is presumed they gave you advantages—in fact, you told me they had sent you to college. You must have learned respect for the law while there. And yet you would have had your men resist forcibly."

"I told you before that I respected the law—so long as the law is just and the fellow I'm fighting is governed by it. But I refuse to fight under a rule that binds one of my hands, while my opponent sails into me with both hands free. I've never been a believer in the doctrine of turn the other cheek. We are made with a capacity for feeling, and it boils, unrestrained, in me. I never could play the hypocrite; I do what my heart prompts me to do, and I say what I think, regardless of consequences."

"That would be a very good method—if everybody followed it," said the girl. "Unfortunately, it invites enmity. Subtlety will take you farther in the world." She was smitten with an impulse, unwise, unconventional. But the conventions!

"Let us be perfectly frank, then," she went on. "I think that perhaps you take yourself too seriously. I think, too, that you face the world in too physical a fashion; that you place too much dependence upon brawn and fire. That, following your own method of speaking your mind, is what I think of you. I tremble to imagine what you think of me for speaking so plainly."

He laughed, his voice vibrating. He looked fairly at her, holding her gaze, compelling it with the intensity of his own, and she drew a deep, tremulous breath of understanding.

"You've brought it on yourself," he said. "I love you. You are going to marry me—some day. That's what I think of you!"

SHE got to her feet, her cheeks flaming, confused, half frightened, though a fierce exultation surged within her. She had half expected this, half dreaded it, and now that it had burst upon her in such volcanic fashion, she realized that she had not been entirely prepared. She sought refuge in banter, facing him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes dancing.

"Firebrand!" she said. "The name fits you—Mr. Carson was right. I warned you—if you remember—that you placed too much dependence on brawn and fire. You are making it very hard for me to see you again."

He had risen too, and he now laughed, frankly.

"I told you I couldn't play the hypocrite. I have said what I think. I want you. But that doesn't mean that I am going to carry you away to the mountains. I've got it off my mind, and I promise not to mention it again—until you wish it. But don't forget that some day you are going to love me."

"How marvelous!" said she, tauntingly, though in her confusion she could not meet his gaze. "How do you purpose to bring it about?"

"By loving you so strongly that you can't help yourself."

"With your confidence—" she began. But he interrupted, laughing:

"We're going to forget it now," he said. "I promised to show you that

pueblo, and we'll have just about time enough to make it and back to the Bar B before dark."

They rode away presently, chatting on indifferent subjects. And keeping his promise, he said not another word about his declaration. But the girl, stealing glances at him, wondered much —and reached no decision.

When they reached the abandoned Indian village, many of its houses still standing, he laughed. "That would make a dandy fort."

"Always thinking of fighting!" she mocked. But her eyes flashed as she looked at him.

CHAPTER X

The Spirit of Manti

THE Benham private car had clacked eastward over the rails three weeks before, bearing with it as a passenger only the negro autocrat. At the last moment, discovering that she could not dissuade Rosalind from her mad decision to stay at Blakeley's ranch, Agatha had accompanied her. The private car was now returning, bearing the man who had poetically declared to his fawning board of directors: "Our railroad is the magic wand that will make the desert bloom like the rose. We are embarked upon a project, gentlemen, so big, so vast, that it makes even your president feel a pulse of pride."

He had then mentioned Corrigan and the Midland grant—another reservation of Providence, which a credulous Congress had bestowed, in fee simple, upon a certain suave gentleman named Marchmont — and disseminated such other details as a servile board of directors needed to know; and then he concluded with a flowery peroration that left his hearers smirking fatuously.

To-day J. Chalfant Benham was come to look upon the first fruits of his efforts.

As he stepped down from the private car he was greeted by vociferous cheers from a jostling and enthusiastic populace—for J. C. had very carefully wired the time of his arrival, and Corrigan had acted accordingly, knowing J. C. well. J. C. was charmed—he said so, later, in a speech from a temporary stand erected in the middle of the street in front of the Plaza, and in saying so he merely told the truth. For, next to money-making, adulation pleased him most.

"Manti is a wonderful town—a *wonderful* town!" he declared, afterward, as he sat in Corrigan's office. "It may be said that success is lurking just ahead. And much of the credit is due to your efforts," he added generously.

CORRIGAN murmured a polite disclaimer and plunged into dry details. J. C. had a passion for dry details. For many hours they sat in the office, their heads close together. Braman was occasionally called in. Judge Lindman was summoned after a time. J. C. shook the Judge's hand warmly and then resumed his chair, folding his chubby hands over his corpulent stomach.

"Judge Lindman," he said; "you thoroughly understand our position in this Midland affair."

The Judge glanced at Corrigan. "Thoroughly," he said.

"No doubt there will be some contests. But the present claimants have no legal status. Mr." (here J. C. mentioned a name that made the Judge's eyes brighten) "tells me there will be no hitch. There could not be, of course. In the absence of any court record of possible transfers, the title to the land, of course, reverts to the Midland Company. As Mr. Corrigan has explained to me, he is entirely within his rights, having secured the title to the land from Mr. Marchmont, representing the Midland. You have no record of any transfers from the Midland to the present claimants or their predecessors, have you? There is no such record?"

The Judge saw Corrigan's amused grin and surmised that J. C. was merely playing with him.

"No," he said with some bitterness.

"Then of course you are going to stand with Mr. Corrigan against the present claimants?"

"I presume so."

"H'm!" said J. C. "If there is any

doubt about it, perhaps I had better remind you—"

The Judge groaned in agony of spirit. "It wont be necessary to remind me."

"So I thought. Well, gentlemen,"—J. C. arose,— "that will be all for this evening."

Thus he dismissed the Judge, who went to his cot behind a partition in the courthouse, while Corrigan and J. C. stepped outside and walked slowly toward the private car. They lingered at the steps; presently J. C. called, and a negro came out with two chairs. J. C. and Corrigan draped themselves in the chairs and smoked. Dusk was settling over Manti; lights appeared in the windows of the buildings; a medley of noises reached the ears of the two men. By day Manti was lively enough; at night it was a maelstrom of frenzied action.

Benham had solemn thoughts, sitting there, watching.

"That crowd wouldn't have much respect for law," he remarked. "They're living at such a pitch that they'd lose their senses entirely if any sudden crisis should arise. I'd feel my way carefully, Corrigan, if I were you."

Corrigan laughed deeply. "Don't lose any sleep over it. There are fifty deputy marshals in that crowd, and they're heeled. The rear room in the bank-building is a young arsenal."

Benham started. "How on earth—" he began.

"Law and order," smiled Corrigan. "A telegram did it. The Territory wants a reputation for safety."

"By the way," said Benham, after a silence. "I *had* to take that Trevison affair out of your hands. We don't want to antagonize the man. He will be valuable to us—later."

"How?"

"Carrington, the engineer I sent out here to look over the country before we started work, did considerable nosing around Trevison's land while in the vicinity. He told me there were unmistakable signs of coal of a good quality and enormous quantity. We ought to be able to drive a good bargain with Trevison one of these days—if we handle him carefully."

Corrigan frowned and grunted. "His land is included in that of the Midland grant. He shall be treated like the others. If that is your only objection—"

"It isn't," said Benham. "I have discovered that Brand Trevison is really Trevison Brandon, the disgraced son of Orrin Brandon, the millionaire."

The darkness hid Corrigan's ugly pout. "How did you discover that?" he said, after a little.

"My daughter mentioned it in one of her letters to me. I confirmed it by quizzing the elder Brandon. Brandon is powerful and obstinate. If he should discover what our game is—"

"You didn't tell him about his son's being out here?"

"Certainly not!"

"Good!"

"What do you mean?"

"That it's my land—that I'm going to take it away from Trevison, father or no father. I'm going to break him. That's what I mean!" Corrigan's big hands were clenched on the arms of his chair; his eyes gleamed balefully in the semidarkness. J. C. felt a tremor of awed admiration for him. He laughed nervously. "Well," he said, "if you think you can handle it—"

They sat there for a long time, smoking in silence. One thought dominated Corrigan's mind: "Three weeks, and exchanging confidences—curse him!"

A DISCORDANT note floated out of the medley of sound in palpitating Manti and smote the ears of the two on the platform. The air rocked an instant later with a cheer, loud, pregnant with enthusiasm. And then a mass of men moved down the street toward the private car.

Benham's face whitened, and he rose from his chair. "Good Lord!" he said. "What's happened?" He felt Corrigan's hand on his shoulder, forcing him back into his chair.

"It can't concern us," said the big man. "Wait; we'll know pretty soon. Something's broke loose."

The two men watched—Benham breathless, wide-eyed, Corrigan with close-set lips and out-thrust chin. The mass of men moved fast. It passed the Plaza, far up the street, receiving addi-

tions each second as men burst out of doors and joined them. But Corrigan noted that the mass had a point, like a wedge, made by three men who seemed to lead it. Something familiar in the stature and carriage of one of the men struck Corrigan, and he strained his eyes into the darkness the better to see. He could be sure of the identity of the man, presently, and he set his jaws tighter and continued to watch, with bitter malignance in his gaze, for the man was Trevison. There was no mistaking the broad shoulders, the set of the head, the big, bold and confident poise of the man. At the point of the wedge he looked what he was—the leader; it became plain to Corrigan as the mass moved closer that he was intent on something that had aroused the enthusiasm of his followers, for there were shouts of: "That's the stuff! Give it to them! Run 'em out!"

For an instant, as the crowd passed the Elk saloon, its lights revealing faces in its glare, Corrigan thought its destination was the private car, and his hand went to his hip. It was withdrawn an instant later, though, when the leader swerved and marched toward the train on the main track. In the light also, Corrigan saw something that gave him a hint of the significance of it all. His laugh broke the tension of the moment.

"It's Denver Ed and Poker Charley," he said to Benham. "It's likely they've been caught cheating and have been invited to make themselves scarce." He laughed again, with slight contempt, at Benham's sigh of relief.

THE mass of men surged around the rear coach of the train. There was some laughter, mingled with jeers, and while this was at its height, a man broke from the crowd and walked rapidly toward Corrigan and Benham. It was Braman. Corrigan questioned him.

"It's two professional gamblers. They've been fleecing Manti's easy marks. To-night they had Clay Levins in the back room of the Belmont. He had about a thousand dollars" (the banker looked at Corrigan and closed an eye), "and they took it away from him. It looked square, and Levins didn't kick. Couldn't, anyway—he's lying in the back room of the Belmont now, paralyzed. I think somebody told Levins' wife about him shooting Marchmont here yesterday, and Mrs. Levins likely sent Trevison after hubby—knowing hubby's appetite for booze. Levins isn't giving the woman a square deal, so far as that is concerned," went on the banker. "She and the kids are in want half the time, and I've heard that Trevison's helped them out on quite a good many occasions. Anyway, Trevison appeared in town this afternoon, looking for Levins. Before he found him, he heard these two beauties framing up on him. That's the result—the two beauties go out. The crowd was for stringing them up, but Trevison wouldn't have it."

"Marchmont?" interrupted Benham. "It isn't possible—"

"Why not?" grinned Corrigan. "Yes sir, the former president of the Midland Company was shot to death yesterday for pocket-picking."

"Lord!" said Benham.

"So Levins' wife sent Trevison for her hubby," said Corrigan, quietly. "She's *that* thick with Trevison, eh?"

"Get that out of your mind, Jeff," returned the banker, noting Corrigan's tone. "Everybody that knows of the case will tell you that everything's straight there."

"Well," Corrigan laughed, "I'm glad to hear it."

CHAPTER XI

At Levins' Cabin

TREVISON dropped from Nigger at the dooryard of Levins' cabin, and looked with a grim smile at Levins himself, who was lying face downward across the saddle on his own pony. He had carried Levins out of the Belmont and had thrown him, as he would have thrown a sack of meal, across the saddle, where he had lain during the four-mile ride, except during two short intervals in which Trevison had lifted him off and laid him flat on the ground to rest. Trevison had meditated, not without a certain

wry humor, upon the strength and the protracted potency of Manti's whisky, for not once during his home-coming had Levins shown the slightest sign of returning consciousness. He was as slack as a meal sack now as Trevison lifted him from the pony's back and let him slip gently to the ground at his feet. A few minutes later, Trevison was standing in the doorway of the cabin, his burden over his shoulder, the weak glare of light from within the cabin stabbing the blackness of the night and revealing him to the white-faced woman who had answered his summons.

Her astonishment had been of the mute, agonized kind. She stood watching, shame and mortification bringing patches of color into her cheeks, as Trevison carried Levins into a bedroom and laid him down, removing his boots. She was standing near the door when Trevison came out of the bedroom; she was facing the blackness of the desert night,—a blacker future, unknowingly. The woman deserved better treatment. He had known her for several years—since the time when Levins, working for him, had brought her from a ranch on the other side of the Divide, announcing their marriage.

It had been a different Levins then, as it was a different wife who stood at the door now. She had faded; the inevitable metamorphosis wrought by neglect, worry and want, had left its husk—a wan, tired-looking woman of thirty who had only her hopes to nourish her soul. There were children, too—if that was any consolation. Through an archway Trevison could see their chubby faces.

But he grinned presently, in an effort to bring cheer into the cabin, reaching into a pocket and bringing out the money he had recovered for Levins.

"There's nearly a thousand dollars here," he said. "Two tin-horn gamblers tried to take it from Clay, but I headed them off. Tell Clay—"

Mrs. Levins' face whitened; she held weakly to one of the door-jambs. It was more money than she had ever seen at one time.

"Clay's?" she interrupted, perplexed. "Why, where—"

"I haven't the slightest idea; but he had it; they tried to take it away from him. It's here now; it belongs to you." He shoved it into her hands and stepped back, smiling at the stark wonder and joy in her eyes. Then he saw the joy vanish—concern and haunting worry came into her eyes.

"They told me that Clay shot—killed—a man yesterday. Is it true?" She cast a fearing look at the bed where the children lay.

"The fools!"

"Then it's true!" She covered her face with her hands, the money in them. Then she took the hands away and looked at the money in them, loathingly. "Do you think Clay—"

"No!" he said shortly, anticipating. "That couldn't be. The man Clay killed had this money on him. Clay accused him of picking his pocket. Clay gave the bartender in the Plaza the number of each bill before he saw them after taking the bills out of the pickpocket's clothing. So it can't be as you feared."

She murmured incoherently and pressed both hands to her breast. He laughed and walked to the door.

"Well, you need it—you and the kiddies. I'm glad to have been of some service to you. Tell Clay he owes me something for cartage. If there is anything I can do for you and Clay and the kiddies, I'd be only too glad."

"Nothing—now," said the woman, gratitude shining from her eyes, mingling with a worried gleam. "Oh," she added passionately, "if Clay was only different! Can't you help him to be strong, Mr. Trevison? Can't you be with him more, to try to keep him straight for the sake of the children?"

"Clay's odd, lately." Trevison frowned. "He seems to have changed a lot. I'll do what I can, of course." He stepped out the door and then looked back, calling: "I'll put Clay's pony away. Good night." And the darkness closed around him.

OVER at Blakeley's ranch, J. C. Benham had just finished an inspection of the interior and had sunk into the depths of a comfortable chair facing his daughter. Blakeley and his wife had

retired, the deal that would place the ranch in possession of Benham having been closed. J. C. gazed critically at his daughter.

"Like it here, eh?" he said. "Well, you look it." He shook a finger at her. "Agatha has been writing to me rather often, lately," he added. There followed no answer, and J. C. went on, narrowing his eyes at the girl: "She tells me that this fellow who calls himself Brand Trevison has proven himself a—shall we say persistent?—escort on your trips of inspection around the ranch."

Rosalind's face slowly crimsoned.

"H'm!" said Benham.

CHAPTER XII

Exposed to the Sunlight

TREVISON did not go to town again for a month. Only once during that time did he see Rosalind Benham, for the Blakeleys had vacated, and goods and servants had arrived from the East and needed attention. Rosalind presided at the Bar B ranch-house, under Agatha's chaperonage, and she had invited Trevison to visit her whenever the mood struck him. He had been in the mood many times, but had found no opportunity, for the various activities of range-work claimed his attention. After a critical survey of Manti and the vicinity, J. C. had climbed aboard his private car to be whisked to New York, where he reported to his board of directors that Manti would one day be one of the greatest commercial centers of the West.

Vague rumors of a legal tangle involving the land around Manti had reached Trevison's ears, and this morning he had jumped on Nigger, determined to run the rumors down. He made a wide swing, following the river, which took him miles from his own property and into the enormous basin which one day the engineers expected to convert into a mammoth lake from which the thirst of many dry acres of land was to be slaked. Halting Nigger near the mouth of the gorge, he watched the many laborers, directed by various grades of bosses, at work building the foundation of the dam.

LATER Trevison crossed the basin, followed the well-beaten trail up the slope to the level, and shortly was in Hanrahan's saloon, across the street from Braman's bank, listening to the plaint of Jim Lefingwell, the Circle Cross owner, whose ranch was east of town. Lefingwell was big, florid and afflicted with perturbation that was almost painful. So exercised was he that he was at times almost incoherent.

"She's boomin', aint she? Meanin' this man's town, of course. An' a man's got a right to cash in on a boom whenever he gits the chance. Well, I'd figgered to cash in. I aint no hawg, an' I got savvy enough to perceive without the aid of any fortune-teller that cattle is done in this country—considered as the main question. I've got a thousand acres of land—which I paid for in spot cash to Dick Kessler about eight years ago. If Dick was here, he'd back me up in that. But he aint here—the fool went an' died about four years ago, leavin' me unprotected.

"Well, now, not digressin' any, I git the idee that I'm goin' to unload consid'able of my thousand acres on the sufferin' fools that's yearnin' to come into this country an' work their heads off raisin' alfalfa an' hawgs an' cabbages an' sons with high collars to be eddicated East an' come back home some day an' lift the mortgage from the old homestead—which job they always falls down on.

"Well, not digressin' any, I run afoul of a guy last week which was dead set on investin' in ten acres of my land, skirtin' one of the irrigation-ditches which they're figgerin' on puttin' in. The price I wanted was a heap satisfyin' to the guy. But he suggests that before he forks over the coin we go down to the courthouse an' muss up the records to see if my title is clear. Well, not digressin' any, she aint! She aint even nowheres clear a-tall—she aint even there! She's wiped off, slick an' clean! There aint a line to show that I ever bought my land from Dick Kessler, an' there aint nothin' on no

record to show that Dick Kessler ever owned it! What do you think of that?

"Now, not digressin' any," he went on as Trevison essayed to speak, "that aint the worst of it. While I was in there, talkin' to Judge Lindman, this here big guy that you fit with—Corrigan—comes in. I gathers from the trend of his remarks that I never had a legal title to my land—that it belongs to the guy which bought it from the Midland Company—which is him. Now what do you think of that?"

"I knew Dick Kessler," said Trevison soberly. "He was honest."

"Square as a dollar!" violently affirmed Lefingwell.

"It's too bad," sympathized Trevison. "That places you in a mighty bad fix. If there's anything I can do for you, why—"

"Mr. Brand Trevison?" said a voice at Trevison's elbow. Trevison turned, to see a short, heavily built man smiling mildly at him.

"I'm a deputy from Judge Lindman's court," announced the man. "I've got a summons for you. Saw you coming in here—saves me a trip to your place." He shoved a paper into Trevison's hands, grinned and went out. For an instant Trevison stood looking after the man, wondering how, since the man was a stranger to him, he had recognized him. Then he opened the paper —to discover that he was ordered to appear before Judge Lindman the following day to show cause why he should not be evicted from certain described property held unlawfully by him. The name, Jefferson Corrigan, appeared as plaintiff in the action. Lefingwell was watching Trevison's face closely, and when he saw it whiten, he muttered understandingly:

"You've got it too, eh?"

"Yes." Trevison shoved the paper into a pocket. "Looks like you're not going to be skinned alone, Lefingwell. Well, so long. I'll see you later."

HE strode out, leaving Lefingwell slightly stunned over his abrupt leave-taking. A minute later he was in the squatty frame courthouse, towering above Judge Lindman, who had been seated at his desk and who had risen at his entrance.

Trevison shoved the summons under Lindman's nose.

"I just got this," he said. "What does it mean?"

"It is perfectly understandable." The Judge smiled with forced affability. "The plaintiff, Mr. Jefferson Corrigan, is a claimant to the title of the land now held by you."

"Corrigan can have no claim on my land; I bought it five years ago from old Buck Peters. He got it from a man named Taylor. Corrigan is bluffing."

The Judge coughed and dropped his gaze from the belligerent eyes of the young man. "That will be determined in court," he said. "The entire land-transactions in this county, covering a period of twenty-five years, are recorded in that book." The Judge indicated a ledger on his desk.

"I'll take a look at it." Trevison reached for the ledger and seized it, the Judge protesting half-heartedly, though with the judicial dignity that had become habitual from long service in his profession.

"This is a high-handed proceeding, young man. You are in contempt of court!" The Judge tried, but could not make his voice ring sincerely. It seemed to him that this vigorous, clear-eyed young man could see the guilt that he was trying to hide.

Trevison laughed grimly, holding the Judge off with one hand while he searched the pages of the book, leaning over the desk. He presently closed the book with a bang and faced the Judge, breathing heavily, his muscles rigid, his eyes cold and glittering.

"There's trickery here!" He took the ledger up and slammed it down on the desk again, his voice vibrating. "Judge Lindman, this isn't a true record; it is not the original record! I saw the original record five years ago, when I went personally to Dry Bottom with Buck Peters to have my deed recorded! This record is a fake; it has been substituted for the original! I demand that you stay proceedings in this matter until a search can be made for the original record!"

"This is the original record." Again

the Judge tried to make his voice ring sincerely, and again he failed. His one mistake had not hardened him, and judicial dignity could not help him to conceal his guilty knowledge. Trevison sprang forward and seized him by the shoulders.

"By the Lord, you *know* it isn't the original!"

The Judge succeeded in meeting Trevison's eyes; but his age, his vacillating will, his guilt, could not combat the overpowering force and virility of this volcanic youth, and his gaze shifted and fell.

He heard Trevison catch his breath; and then he stood white and shaking beside the desk, looking at Trevison as the young man went out of the door—a laugh on his lips, mirthless, bitter, portending trouble.

CORRIGAN was sitting at his desk in the bank-building when Trevison entered the front door. The big man seemed to have been expecting his visitor, for just before the latter appeared at the door, Corrigan took a pistol from a pocket and laid it on the desk beside him, placing a sheet of paper over it. He swung slowly around and faced Trevison, cold interest in his gaze. He nodded shortly as Trevison's eyes met his.

In a dozen long strides Trevison was at his side. The young man was pale; his lips were set; he was breathing fast. But he exercised repression that made the atmosphere of the room tingle with tension. And he seated himself deliberately on one corner of Corrigan's desk, one leg dangling, the other resting on the floor, one hand resting on the idle leg, his body bent, his shoulders drooping a little forward. His voice was dry and light—Patrick Carson would have said his grin was tigerlike.

"So that's the kind of a whelp you are!" he said.

Corrigan caught his breath; his hands clenched; his face reddened darkly. He shot a quick glance at the sheet of paper under which he had placed the pistol. Trevison interpreted it, brushed the paper aside, disclosing the weapon. His lips curled; he picked up the pistol, "broke" it, tossed cartridges and weapon into a corner of the desk and laughed.

"So you were expecting me!" he said. "Well, I'm here. You want my land, eh?"

"I want the land that I'm entitled to under the terms of my purchase—the original Midland grant, consisting of one hundred thousand acres. It belongs to me, and I mean to have it!"

"You're a liar, Corrigan," said the young man, holding the other's gaze coldly. "You're a lying, sneaking crook. You have no claim to the land, and you know it!"

Corrigan smiled stiffly. "The record of the deal I made with Jim Marchmont years before any of you people usurped the property is in my pocket at this minute. The court, here, will uphold it."

Trevison narrowed his eyes at the big man and laughed, bitter humor in the sound.

"It takes nerve, Corrigan, to do what you are attempting—sheer, brazen gall! It's been done, though, by little, pettifogging shysters, by piking real-estate crooks; thousands of parcels of property scattered all over the United States have been filched in that manner. But a hundred thousand acres! It's the biggest steal that's ever been attempted, to my knowledge, short of a Government grab, and your imagination does you credit. It's easy to see what's been done. You've got a fake title from Marchmont, antedating ours; you've got a crooked judge here, to befuddle the thing with legal technicalities; you've got the money, the power, the greed and the cold-blooded determination.

"But I don't think you understand what you're up against—do you? Nearly every man who owns this land that you want has worked hard for it. It's been bought with work, man—work and lonesomeness and blood, and souls. And now you want to sweep it all away with one stroke. You want to step in here and reap the benefit; you want to send us out of here, beggars."

His voice leaped from its repression; it now betrayed the passion that was consuming him. "You can't hand me that sort of a raw deal, Corrigan, and

make me like it. Understand that, right now. You're bucking the wrong man. You can drag the courts into it; you can wriggle around a thousand legal corners, but you can't avert what's bound to come if you don't lay off this deal. And that's a fight!"

CORRIGAN leaned back in his chair, smiling coldly, idly flecking a bit of cigar ash from his shirt.

"I am prepared for a fight. You'll get plenty of it before you're through, if you don't lie down and be good." There was malice in his look, complacent consciousness of his power. More, there was an impulse to reveal to this young man whom he was presently to ruin, at least one of the motives that was driving him. He yielded to the impulse.

"I'm going to tell you something. I think I would have let you out of this deal, if you hadn't been so fresh. But you made a grandstand play before the girl I am going to marry. You showed off your horse to make a bid for her favor. You paraded before her window in the car to attract her attention. I saw you. You rode me down. You'll get no mercy. I'm going to break you. I'm going to send you back to your father, Brandon, Senior, in worse condition than when you left ten years ago." He sneered as Trevison started and stepped to the floor, rigid.

"How did you recognize me?" Curiosity had dulled the young man's passion; his tone was hoarse.

"How?" Corrigan laughed mockingly. "Did you think you could repose any confidence in a woman you have known only about a month? Did you think she wouldn't tell me—her promised husband? She has told me everything that she succeeded in getting out of you. She is heart and soul with me in this deal. She is ambitious. Do you think she would hesitate to sacrifice a clodhopper like you? She's very clever, Trevison; she's deep, and more than a match for you in wits. Fight, if you like; you'll get no sympathy there."

Trevison's faith in Miss Benham had received a shock; Corrigan's words had not killed it, however.

"You're a liar!" he said.

Corrigan flushed, but smiled coldly. "How many people know that you have coal on your land, Trevison?"

HE saw Trevison's hands clench, and he laughed in grim amusement. Then he looked up, and the smile froze on his lips, for within a foot of his chest was the muzzle of Trevison's pistol. He saw the trigger finger contracting, saw Trevison's free hand clenched, the muscles corded and knotted — he felt the breathless, strained, unreal calm that precedes tragedy. He slowly stiffened, but he did not shrink an inch.

"No; you wont do it, Trevison," he said, slowly. "You're not that kind." He deliberately swung around in the chair and drew another cigar from a box on the desk-top, lighted it and leaned back, again facing the threatening pistol.

Trevison restored the pistol to the holster, brushing a hand uncertainly over his eyes as though to clear his mental vision, for the shock that had come with the revelation of Miss Benham's duplicity had made his brain reel with a lust to kill. He laughed hollowly.

"You're right; it wouldn't do. It would be plain murder, and I'm not quite up to that. You know your men, don't you—you coyote's whelp! You know I'll fight fair. You'll do yours underhandedly. Get up! There's your gun! Load it! Let's see if you've got the nerve to face a gun, with one in your own hand!"

"I'll do my fighting in my own way." Corrigan's eyes kindled, but he did not move. Trevison made a gesture of contempt and wheeled to go. As he turned, he caught a glimpse of a hand holding a pistol. It pointed toward him through a crack in the door that led to the rear room. He drew his own weapon with a single movement, and swung around to Corrigan.

"I'll bore you if you wink an eyelash!" he warned in a whisper.

Then he leaped to the door, lunging against it and sending it crashing back so that it smashed against the wall, overbalancing some boxes that reposed

on a shelf and sending them clattering. He stood in the opening, braced for another leap. Against the partition, which was still swaying, stood Braman—his arms outstretched, a pistol in one hand, trying to crowd still farther back to escape the searching glance of Trevison's eyes.

HE had overheard Trevison's tense whisper to Corrigan. The cold savagery in it had paralyzed him; he gasped as Trevison's eyes found him, and the pistol that he tried to raise dangled futilely from his nerveless fingers. It thudded heavily upon the boards of the floor an instant later, a shriek of fear mingling with the sound as he went down in a heap from a vicious, deadening blow from Trevison's fist.

Trevison's leap upon Braman had been swift; he was back in the doorway instantly, looking at Corrigan, his eyes ablaze with rage.

"That explains your nerve!" he taunted. "It's a frame-up. You sent the deputy after me—pointed me out when I went into Hanrahan's. That's how he knew me! You knew I'd come in here to have it out with you, and you figured to have Braman shoot me when my back was turned!" He swung his pistol on Corrigan; the big man gripped the arms of his chair and sat rigid, staring, motionless. For an instant there was no sound. Then Trevison laughed again.

"Bah!" he said. "I can't use your methods! You're safe so long as you don't move." He laughed again as he looked down at the banker. Reaching down, he grasped the inert man by the scruff of the neck and dragged him through the door, out into the banking-room, past Corrigan, who watched him wonderingly, and to the front, where he dropped him and turning, answered the question that he saw shining in Corrigan's eyes:

"I don't work in the dark! We'll take this case out into the sunlight, so the whole town can have a look at it!"

He stooped swiftly, grasped Braman around the middle, swung him aloft and hurled him through the window into the street, the glass, shattered, clashing and jangling around him. He turned to Corrigan, laughing lowly:

"Get up. Manti will want to know. I'm going to do the talking!"

He forced Corrigan to the front door, and stood on the threshold behind him.

A hundred doorways were vomiting men. The crash of glass had carried far, and visions of a bank-robbery filled many brains as their owners raced toward the doorway, where Trevison stood with the muzzle of his pistol jammed firmly against Corrigan's back.

THE crowd gathered in the manner peculiar to such scenes, coming from all directions and converging at one point, massing densely in front of the bank-building.

No one touched Braman. On the contrary, there were many in the front fringe who braced their bodies against the crush, shoving backward, crying that a man was hurt and needed breathing-space. They were unheeded, and when the banker presently recovered consciousness he was lifted to his feet and stood pressed close to the building, swaying dizzily, pale, weak and shaken.

Word had gone through the crowd that it was not a robbery, for there were many there who knew Trevison; they shouted greetings to him, and he answered them, standing back of Corrigan, grim and somber.

Foremost in the crowd was Mullarky, who on another day had seen a fight at this same spot. He had taken a stand directly in front of the door of the bank and had been using his eyes and his wits rapidly since his coming. And when two or three men from the crowd edged forward and tried to push their way to Corrigan, Mullarky drew a pistol and leaped to the door. He landed beside Trevison and trained his weapon on Corrigan's henchmen.

"Stand back, or I'll plug you, sure as I'm a foot high! There's hell to pay here, an' me friend gets a square deal —whatever he's done!"

"Right!" came other voices from various points in the crowd. "A square deal—no interference!"

Judge Lindman came out into the street, urged by curiosity. He had

stepped down from the doorway of the courthouse and had instantly been carried with the crowd to a point directly in front of Corrigan and Trevison, where he stood bareheaded, pale, watching silently. Corrigan saw him, and smiled faintly at him. The Easterner's eye sought out several faces in the crowd near him, and when he finally caught the gaze of a certain individual who had been eying him inquiringly for some moments, he slowly closed an eye and moved his head slightly toward the rear of the building.

Instantly the man whistled shrilly with his fingers as though to summon some one far down the street, and slipping around the edge of the crowd, made his way around to the rear of the bank-building, where he was joined presently by other men, roughly garbed, who carried pistols. One of them climbed in through a window and opened the door; and the others—numbering twenty-five or thirty—dived into the room.

OUT in front a silence had fallen. Trevison had lifted a hand, and the crowd strained its ears to hear.

"I've caught a crook!" declared Trevison, the frenzy of fight still surging through his veins. "He's not a cheap crook; I give him credit for that. All he wants to do is to steal the whole county. He'll do it, too, if we don't head him off. I'll tell you more about him in a minute. There's another of his stripe." He pointed to Braman, who cringed. "I threw him out through the window, where the sunlight could shine on him. He tried to shoot me in the back—the big crook, here, framed up on me.

"I want you all to know what you're up against. They're after all the land in this section; they've clouded every title. It's a raw, dirty deal. I see now why they haven't sold a foot of the land they own here, why they've shoved the cost of leases up until it's ruination to pay them. They're land-thieves, commercial pirates. They're going to euchre everybody out of—"

Trevison caught a sudden gasp from the crowd. He saw the mass sway in unison, stiffen, stand rigid; and he turned his head quickly, to see the door behind him, and the broken window through which he had thrown Braman—the break running almost the entire width of the building—filled with men armed with rifles.

He divined the situation, sensed his danger—the danger that faced the crowd should one of its members make a hostile movement.

"Steady there, boys!" he shouted. "Don't start anything. These men are here through prearrangement; it's another frame-up. Keep your guns out of sight!" He turned, to see Corrigan grinning contemptuously at him. He met the look with naked exultation and triumph.

"Got your bodyguard within call, eh?" he jeered. "You need one. You've cut me short, all right; but I've said enough to start a fire that will rage through this part of the country until every damned thief is burned out! You've selected the wrong man for a victim, Corrigan."

He stepped down into the street, sheathing his pistol. He heard Corrigan's voice, calling after him, saying:

"Grandstand play again!"

Trevison turned; the gaze of the two men met and held, their hatred glowing bitter in their eyes. The gaze broke, like two sharp blades rasping apart; Corrigan turned to his deputies, scowling—and Trevison pushed his way through the crowd.

FIVE minutes later, while Corrigan was talking with the deputies and Braman in the rear room of the bank-building, Trevison was standing in the courthouse talking with Judge Lindman. The Judge stared out into the street at some members of the crowd that still lingered.

"This town will be a volcano of lawlessness if it doesn't get a square deal from you, Lindman," said Trevison. "You have seen what a mob looks like. You're the representative of justice here, and if we don't get justice, we'll come and hang you in spite of a thousand deputies! Remember that!"

He stalked out, leaving behind him a white-faced, trembling old man who

was facing a crisis which made the future look very black and dismal. He was wondering if, after all, hanging wouldn't be better than the sunlight shining on a deed which each day he regretted more than on the preceding day.

Trevison, riding Nigger out of town, was estimating the probable effect of his crowd-drawing action upon Judge Lindman, and considering bitterly the perfidy of the woman who had cleverly drawn him on, to betray him.

CHAPTER XIII

Another Letter

THAT afternoon Corrigan rode to the Bar B. The ranch-house was of the better class, big, imposing, well-kept, with a wide, roofed porch running across the front and partly around both sides. It stood in a grove of cottonwood on a slight eminence, and could be seen for miles from the undulating trail that led to Manti. Corrigan arrived shortly after noon, to find Rosalind gone—for a ride, Agatha told him, after she had greeted him at the edge of the porch.

Agatha had not been pleased over Rosalind's rides with Trevison as a companion. She was loyal to her brother, and she did not admire the bold recklessness that shone so frankly and unmistakably in Trevison's eyes. Had she been Rosalind, she would have preferred the big, sleek, well-groomed man of affairs who had called to-day. And because of her preference for Corrigan, she sat long on the porch with him and told him many things—things that darkened the big man's face. And when, as they were talking, Rosalind came, Agatha discreetly retired, leaving the two alone.

"It's a great country, isn't it?" said Corrigan, presently, his eyes on the broad reaches of plain, green-brown in the shimmering sunlight. "Look at it—almost as big as some of the Old World states! It's a wonderful country. I feel like a feudal baron, with the destinies of an important principality in the clutch of my hand!"

"Yes; it must give one a feeling of great responsibility to know that one has an important part in the development of a section like this."

He laughed, deep in his throat, at the awe in her voice. "I ought to have seen its possibilities years ago—I should have been out here, preparing for this. But when I bought the land, I had no idea it would one day be so valuable."

"Bought it?"

"A hundred thousand acres of it. I got it very cheap." He told her about the Midland grant and his purchase from Marchmont.

"I never heard of that before!" she told him.

"It wasn't generally known. In fact, it was apparently generally considered that the land had been sold by the Midland Company to various people, in small parcels. Unscrupulous agents engineered the sales, I suppose. But the fact is that I made the purchase from the Midland Company years ago—largely as a personal favor to Jim Marchmont, who needed money badly. And a great many of the ranch-owners around here really have no title to their land and will have to give it up."

SHE breathed deeply. "That will be a great disappointment to them, now that there exists the probability of a great advance in the value of the land."

"That was the owners' lookout. A purchaser should see that his deed is clear before closing a deal."

"What owners will be affected?" She spoke with a slight breathlessness.

"Many." He named some of them, leaving Trevison to the last, and then watching her furtively out of the corners of his eyes and noting, with straightened lips, the quick gasp she gave. She said nothing; she was thinking of the great light that had been in Trevison's eyes on the day he had told her of his ten years of exile; she could remember his words—they had been vivid fixtures in her mind ever since: "I own five thousand acres, and about a thousand acres of it is the best coal-land in the United States. I wouldn't sell it for love or money, for when your father gets his railroad running, I'm going to cash in on ten of the

leanest and hardest and lonesomest years that any man ever put in."

"You will take it all?" she asked.

"He will still hold one hundred and sixty acres—the quarter-section granted him by the Government, which he has undoubtedly proved on."

"Why—" she began, and paused, for to go further would be to inject her own affairs into the conversation.

"Trevison is an evil in the country," he went on, speaking in a judicial manner but watching her narrowly. "Men of his sort retard civilization. He opposes law and order—defies them. It is a shock, I know, to learn that the title to property that you have regarded as your own for years is in jeopardy. But still, a man can play the man and not yield to lawless impulses."

"What has happened?"

"Very little, from Trevison's viewpoint, I suppose," he laughed. "He came into my office this morning, after being served with a summons from Judge Lindman's court in regard to the title of his land, and tried to kill me. Failing in that, he knocked poor inoffensive little Braman down—who had interfered in my behalf—and threw him bodily through the front window of the building, glass and all. It's lucky for him that Braman was not hurt. After that he tried to incite a riot, which Judge Lindman nipped in the bud by sending a number of deputies, armed with rifles, to the scene. It was a wonderful exhibition of outlawry. I was very sorry to have it happen, and any more such outbreaks will result in Trevison's being jailed—if not worse."

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. But she made no other comment.

"From what I understand, Trevison has always been a disturber," resumed Corrigan. "He disgraced himself at college, and afterwards—to such an extent that his father cut him off. He hasn't changed, apparently; he is still doing the same old tricks. He had some sort of a love-affair before coming West, your father told me. God help the girl that marries him!"

The girl flushed at the last sentence; she replied to the preceding one:

"Yes. Hester Keyes threw him over, after he broke with his father."

She did not see Corrigan's eyes quicken, for she was wondering if, after all, Hester Keyes had not acted wisely in breaking with Trevison.

"Hester Keyes!" said Corrigan musingly. "Did she marry a fellow named Harvey—afterwards? Winslow Harvey, I believe. He died soon after?"

"Yes—do you know her?"

"Slightly." Corrigan laughed. "I knew her father. Well, well. So Trevison worshiped there, did he? Was he badly hurt—do you know?"

"I do not know."

"Well," said Corrigan, getting up, and speaking lightly, as though dismissing the subject from his mind, "I presume he was—and still is, for that matter. A person never forgets the first love." He smiled at her. "Wont you go with me for a short ride?"

The ride was taken, but a disturbing question lingered in Rosalind's mind throughout, and would not be solved. Had Trevison forgotten Hester Keyes?

What Corrigan thought was expressed in a satisfied chuckle as later he loped his horse toward Manti. That night he wrote a letter and sent it East. It was addressed to Mrs. Hester Harvey and was subscribed: "Your old friend Jeff."

CHAPTER XIV

A Rumble of War

THE train that carried Corrigan's letter eastward bore, among its few other passengers, a young man with a jaw set like a steel trap. Two other passengers in the coach watched him warily; and once, when he got up and walked to the front of the car, one of the passengers remarked to the other: "That guy is in a temper where murder would come easy to him."

The train left Manti at nine o'clock in the evening. At midnight it pulled up at the little frame station in Dry Bottom, and the young man leaped off and strode rapidly away into the darkness of the desert town. A little later

J. Blackstone Graney, attorney at law, and former judge of the United States District Court at Dry Bottom, heard a loud hammering on the door of his residence at the outskirts of town. He got up, with a grunt of resentment for all heavy-fisted fools abroad on midnight errands, and went downstairs to admit a grim-faced stranger.

"I'm Brand Trevison, owner of the Diamond K ranch, near Manti," said the stranger with blunt sharpness that made the Judge blink. "I've a case on in the Manti court at ten o'clock tomorrow—to-day," he corrected. "They are going to try to swindle me out of my land, and I've got to have a lawyer —a real one. I could have got half a dozen in Manti,—such as they are,—but I want somebody who is wise in the law, and with the sort of honor that money and power can't blast. I want you!"

JUDGE GRANEY looked sharply at his visitor, and smiled. "You are evidently desperately harried. Sit down and tell me about your case." He waved to a chair, and Trevison dropped into it, sitting on its edge. The Judge took another; and with the kerosene lamp between them on a table, Trevison related what had occurred during the previous morning in Manti. When he concluded, the Judge's face was serious.

"If what you say is true, it is a very awkward, not to say suspicious, situation. Being the only lawyer in Dry Bottom, until the coming of Judge Lindman, I have had occasion many times to consult the record you speak of, and if my memory serves me well, I have noted several times—quite casually, of course, since I have never been directly concerned with the records of the land in your vicinity—that several transfers of title to the original Midland grant have been recorded. Your deed would show, of course, the date of your purchase from Buck Peters, and we shall, perhaps, be able to determine the authenticity of the present record in that manner. But if, as you believe, the records have been tampered with, we are facing a long, hard legal battle which may or may not result in an ultimate victory for us—depending upon the power behind the interests opposed to you."

"I'll fight them to the Supreme Court of the United States!" declared Trevison. "I'll fight them with the law or without it!"

"I know it," said Graney, with a shrewd glance at the other's grim face. "But be careful not to do anything that will jeopardize your liberty. If those men are what you think they are, they would be only too glad to have you break some law that would give them an excuse to jail you. You couldn't do much fighting then, you know." He got up. "There's a train out of here in about an hour; we'll take it."

ABOUT six o'clock that morning the two men stepped off the train at Manti. Graney went directly to a hotel, to wash and breakfast, while Trevison, a little tired and hollow-eyed from loss of sleep and from excitement, and with a two days' growth of beard on his face which made him look worse than he actually felt, sought the livery-stable where he had left Nigger the night before, mounted the animal and rode rapidly out of town toward the Diamond K.

He took a trail that led through the cut where on another morning he had startled the laborers by riding down the wall,—Nigger eating up the ground with long, sure, swift strides,—passing Pat Carson and his men at a point on the level about a quarter-mile beyond the cut. He waved a hand to Carson as he flashed by, and something in his manner caused Carson to remark to the engineer of the dinky engine:

"Somethin's up wid Trevison ag'in, Murph; he's got a domned mean look in his eye. I'm the onluckiest son av a gun in the worruld, Murph! First I miss seein' this fire-eater bate the face off the big ilephant Corrigan, an' yisterday I was figgerin' on goin' to town—but I didn't; an' I miss seein' that little whiffet of a Braman flyin' through the windy. Now, what do ye suppose that gang av min wid Winchesters was doin', comin' from thot direction this mornin'?" He pointed toward the trail that Trevison was rid-

ing. "An' that big stiff Corrigan wid thim!"

Trevison got the answer to this query the minute he reached the Diamond K ranch-house. His foreman came running to him, pale, disgusted, his voice snapping like a whip:

"They've busted your desk an' rifled it! Twenty guys who said they was deputies from the court in Manti, an' Corrigan! I was here alone, watchin', as you told me. But I couldn't move a finger."

Trevison dismounted and ran into the house. The room that he used as an office was in a state of disorder. Papers and books littered the floor. It was evident that a thorough search had been made—for something. Trevison darted to the desk and ran a hand into the pigeonhole in which he kept the deed which he had come for. The hand came out empty. He sprang to the door of a small closet, where, in a box that contained some ammunition he kept for the use of his men, he had placed the money that Rosalind Benham had brought to him. The money was not there. He walked to the center of the room and stood for an instant, surveying the mass of litter around him, reeling, rage-drunken.

"Shall I get the boys an' go out after them sneaks?" questioned Barkwell, the foreman, his voice tremulous. "We'll clean 'em out—smoke 'em out of the county!" he threatened. He started for the door.

"Wait!" Trevison had conquered the first surge of passion; his grin was cold and bitter as he crossed glances with his foreman. "Don't do anything —yet. I'm going to play the peace string out. If it doesn't work, why then—" He tapped his pistol-holster significantly.

"You get a few of the boys and stay here with them. It isn't probable that they'll try anything like that again, because they've got what they wanted. But if they happen to come again, hold them until I come. I'm going to court."

LATER, in Manti, Trevison found Judge Graney in his room in the hotel.

"H'm!" said the latter, compressing his lips. "That's sharp practice. They are not wasting any time."

"Was it legal?"

"The law is elastic—some judges stretch it more than others. A search-warrant and a writ of attachment probably did the business in this case. What I can't understand is why Judge Lindman issued the writ at all—if he did so. You are the defendant, and you certainly would have brought the deed into court as a means of proving your case."

Trevison had mentioned the missing money, though he did not think it important to explain where it had come from. And Judge Graney did not ask him. But when court opened at the appointed time, with a dignity which was a mockery to Trevison, and Judge Graney had explained that he had come to represent the defendant in the action, he mildly inquired the reason for the forcible entry into his client's house, explaining also that since the defendant was required to prove his case it was optional with him whether or not the deed be brought into court at all.

Corrigan had been on time; he had nodded curtly to Trevison when he entered to take the chair in which he now sat, and had smiled when Trevison had deliberately turned his back. He smiled when Judge Graney asked the question—a faint, evanescent smirk. But at Judge Lindman's reply he sat staring stolidly, his face an impenetrable mask:

"There was no mention of a deed in the writ of attachment issued by this court. Nor has the court any knowledge of the existence of such a deed. The officers of the court were commanded to proceed to the defendant's house, for the purpose of finding, if possible, and delivering to this court the sum of twenty-seven hundred dollars, which amount, representing the money paid to the defendant by the railroad company for certain grants and privileges, is to remain in possession of the court until the title to the land in litigation has been legally awarded."

"But the court officers seized the de-

fendant's deed also," objected Judge Graney.

Judge Lindman questioned a deputy who sat in the rear of the room. The latter replied that he had seen no deed. Yes, he admitted, in reply to a question of Judge Graney's, it might have been possible that Corrigan had been alone in the office for a time.

Graney looked inquiringly at Corrigan. The latter looked steadily back at him. "I saw no deed," he said coolly. "In fact, it wouldn't be *possible* for me to see any deed, for Trevison has no title to the property he speaks of."

JUDGE GRANEY made a gesture of impotence to Trevison, then spoke slowly to the court: "I am afraid that without the deed it will be impossible for us to proceed. I ask a continuance until a search can be made."

Judge Lindman coughed. "I shall have to refuse the request. The plaintiff is anxious to take possession of his property, and as no reason has been shown why he should not be permitted to do so, I hereby return judgment in his favor. Court is dismissed."

"I give notice of appeal," said Graney.

Outside, a little later, Judge Graney looked gravely at Trevison. "There's knavery here, my boy; there's some sort of influence behind Lindman. Let's see some of the other owners who are likely to be affected."

This task took them two days, and resulted in the discovery that no other owner had secured a deed to his land. Lefingwell explained the omission.

"A sale is a sale," he said. "Or a sale *has* been a sale until now. Land has changed hands out here just the same as we'd trade a horse for a cow or a pipe for jackknife. There was no questions asked. When a man had a piece of land to sell, he sold it, got his money an' didn't bother to give a receipt. Half the fools in this country wouldn't know a deed from a marriage-license, an' they haven't been needin' one or the other. For when a man has a wife, she's continually remindin' him of it, an' he can't forget it; he's got her. It's the same with his land—he's got it. So far as I know, there's never been a deed issued for my land—or any of the land in that Midland grant, except Trevison's."

"It looks as though Corrigan had considered that phase of the matter," dryly observed Judge Graney. "The case doesn't look very hopeful. However, I shall take it before the Circuit Court of Appeals, in Santa Fe."

He was gone a week and returned disgusted but determined.

"They denied our appeal, said they might have considered it if we had some evidence to offer showing that we had some sort of a claim to the title. When I told them of my conviction that the records had been tampered with, they laughed at me."

"Perhaps the long arm of power has reached to Santa Fe," said Trevison.

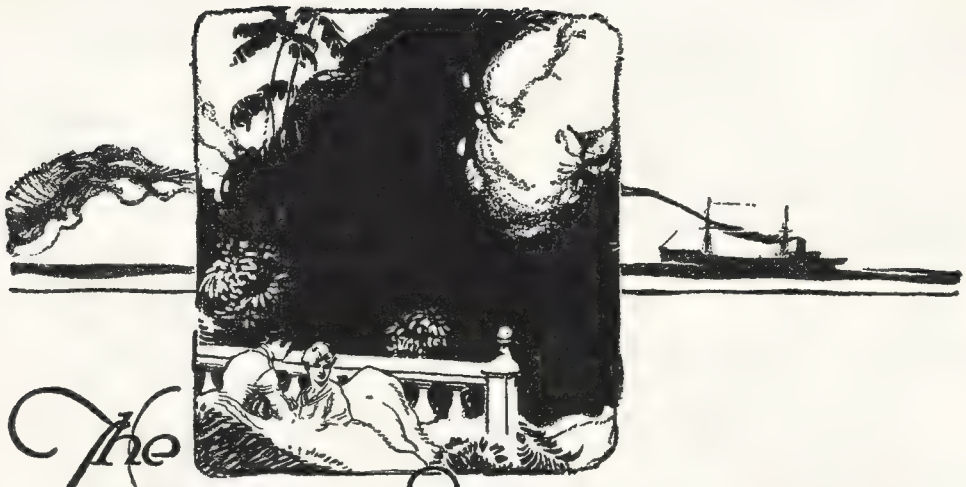
"It wont reach to Washington," declared the Judge decisively. "And if you say the word, I'll go there and see what I can do. It's an outrage!"

"I was hoping you'd go there; there's no limit," said Trevison. "But as I see the situation, everything depends upon the discovery of the original record. I'm convinced that it is still in existence, and that Judge Lindman knows where it is. I'm going to get it, or—"

"Easy, my friend," cautioned the Judge. "I know how you feel. But you can't fight the law with lawlessness. You lie quiet until you hear from me. That is all there is to be done, anyway—win or lose."

Trevison clenched his teeth. "I might feel that way about it, if I had been as careless of my interests as the other owners here, but I safeguarded my interests, trusted them to the regularly recognized law out here, and I'm going to fight for them! Why, good Lord, man, I've worked ten years for that land! Do you think I will see it go *without* a fight?" He laughed, and the Judge shook his head at the sound.

How Firebrand Trevison fought against Corrigan's plot—and many other interesting things—will be told in the next installment of *"Firebrand Trevison,"* in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale February 1st.



The Minority Stockholder

by John Fleming Wilson

WHEN Angela Barstow learned that her own control of the Southern Mail steamship line was threatened by a single stockholder who was vaguely known as "Penn Missions," she called on Ezekiel Ames and demanded of that aged crony of her dead father's who, what and where this person was.

"You know," she said, "when Father left this line to me with you three old friends and associates of his to help me run it, there was no question of our ever having to fight anybody whom he'd let have stock. I've had trouble with F. Edwin Hinderwick of the All-Seas Trust, and I've shown him that a girl is equal to him. And Hinderwick never yet pretended to be a missionary. Explain!"

Captain Ezekiel called in Angela's godfather, his associate director. Shamefacedly they sat and looked at their lovely protégée.

"We could ha' handled the matter alone," Captain Matthews said, pulling at his thin whiskers. "But—"

Ames nodded. "Penn Missions is a lady like yourself," he muttered.

"No real lady was ever named so," Angela returned. "You're hiding something from me."

Her tone was severe. With haste the two oldsters summoned the chief clerk and demanded certain correspondence. When it lay on the desk before her, Miss Barstow picked up the narrow sheets covered with stiff, angular script and read them. The final one made her flush. It ran:

PENN MISSIONS
WAIKIKI, HONOLULU, 26th March.

Mr. Ezekiel Ames,
Southern Mail Steamship Company,
San Francisco, California.

Dear Sir:

I have received your valued favor of the tenth of March in reply to my letter stating that I could not see my way clear to allowing the money invested by the sainted founder of the Penn Missions to be employed as you are using it.

I beg to call your attention again to the fact that our ships are carrying opium, liquors and tobacco. Nothing pure can issue from an impure source. This must stop.

I have carefully considered the matter from every angle, and as the custodian of the funds which go to educate and elevate our dear heathen peoples, I must refuse to accept dividends got in direct opposition to our teachings.

I refuse my consent to your further continuing in an unrighteous commerce subversive to all decency.

Sincerely yours,
LUCY ABIGAIL ADAMSON.

"The—the absurd creature!" Angela remarked with heat. "She runs an old

mission to teach the savages dressmaking and dares accuse me of wickedness! Anyway, she hasn't a leg—I ask pardon of the Penn Missions—a limb to stand on She's only a minority stockholder, and she can't do anything."

CAPTAIN AMES stirred uneasily in his chair. "My dear Angela!" he faltered.

"Why make such a fuss over Penn Missions?" she pursued. "Tell her I told her to sell out if she doesn't like a twelve per cent return on her old investment."

"That's just it," Matthews interposed. "She threatens to do so."

"Well?" Miss Barstow demanded challengingly.

Ames drew a long cablegram from a drawer and silently passed it to her. It read:

HONOLULU, 26 May.

Southern Mail SS. Co.,
San Francisco, Cal.

If my request not heeded I shall accept offer F. Edwin Hinderwick of All-Seas Trust who will buy my stock and guarantee purification of the temple.

ADAMSON.

"The temple," Captain Matthews explained dolefully, "is our line."

Angela looked at her two advisers. "We know the excellent Hinderwick," she said coldly. "A pretty person to gain the confidence of Lucy Abigail! And enough minority stock to make trouble! I thought the Honorable F. Edwin had had enough. It seems not."

Captain Ames spoke his mind briefly, concluding with, "I happen to know that Miss Adamson is a very conscientious lady with very limited experience—just the kind of person Hinderwick can manage. He's smooth and calculating."

"He's calculating on the wrong facts again," Angela answered crisply. "If Lucy Abigail is what you say,—a girl brought up in a rich small town and suddenly sent to Hawaii to manage a queer, nonreligious mission which her favorite aunt financed,—Mr. Hinderwick is out of his reckoning. I shall deal with Lucy Abigail!"

"You must act quickly," Matthews murmured.

ANGELA pressed the buzzer button and called for Captain Israel Simms. That personage arrived calmly and awaited orders.

"Read this," Angela ordered him, and handed over the letter and the cable.

Captain Simms' face did not change during the perusal. When he had finished, he looked up.

"You'll do," Angela said curtly. "Just look at Miss Adamson that way, and she'll hand her stock over to you."

"You want her stock?" Simms inquired.

"The stock and her herself," Angela announced. "Matter of pride—we can't have two women with minds of their own on the Pacific. Turn your ship over to the man Captain Ames designates, go to Honolulu and bring Lucy Abigail back with you to tea."

Captain Simms flushed. "Maybe you misunderstand the—er—lady," he ventured.

Angela smiled splendidly. "Very likely. Hurry now!"

When Israel Simms had duly accepted his commission and was gone, the two old directors vigorously frowned on the whole scheme.

"Ten to one Simms will fall in love with her and ruin everything," Ames remarked.

"Captain Simms is in love with me—though he doesn't know it," she returned. "He probably never will know it." She sighed. "I—I like Captain Simms. I like him so well that I know Lucy Abigail will fall in love with him. What that girl needs is to meet a man so utterly unlike that man Hinderwick that she will see the difference between a hypocrite and a real man."

After a shrewd glance at his god-daughter, Captain Matthews veered suddenly. "I thoroughly approve of Simms' being sent south on this errand," he proclaimed.

"Nothing better could be devised," agreed Ames.

When Miss Barstow had departed, Martin Conrad, the third of the three comrades to whom Henry Barstow had bequeathed the charge of his property and his daughter, came in to listen. He voiced in three words the feeling they feared to express:

"Simms must go."

"Right!" said Matthews. "Angela is —just a girl. Sooner or later—"

Ames glanced up. "She doesn't know what being in love means!"

AND in her own house, pouring tea for the stolid and imperturbable Israel Simms, the girl they spoke of was preaching astounding doctrine.

"This Miss Adamson has never met men who wanted something for themselves and were frank about it. She has lived among people who talked too much about Penn Missions and sociology for the savages. You and I know that Hinderwick is the kind of fellow who follows a lead. He would know no other way to approach Lucy Abigail except by pretending a prodigious interest in her old missions. I warn you, Captain Simms! Make Miss Adamson feel that you don't care anything about the heathen but a whole lot about her, and she will view matters in the light of a new experience."

Simms lifted his steady eyes to his superior. "Conscientious scruples?" he inquired. "I believe I should have to respect them."

Angela cupped her chin in her palms and smiled across the tea-table.

"Heaven forbid that I should ask you not to," she responded. "I'm sending you down exactly for the purpose of offsetting the evil influence of Mr. Hinderwick. Don't let this poor girl be deceived!"

Israel Simms mused awhile over this. "I must protect her against him," he said presently.

"Against herself," Angela said. "I needn't tell you how to go about it. The chief thing is to make her absolutely sure that you don't give a whistle for Penn Missions but care a whole lot for Lucy Abigail. Buy her stock yourself."

"I would like to, but a hundred thousand dollars is three times as much as I could raise," he said.

"I'll give it to you—by cable," Angela answered.

Simms looked up, his face slightly flushed. "Would that be fair?"

Miss Barstow leaned back in her chair, dreamy-eyed. She did not reply to the question, but later she remarked: "You have my idea exactly. I leave it all to you, and I'll neither give directions nor ask questions."

To her mirror that night she confessed: "I'm glad he's gone! I hope Lucy Abigail appreciates what I have done. I know he's too good for her! What luck that I managed to get her picture! Lucy Abigail, you'll never know how much it cost me to get your stock!"

ON the *lanai* of a cottage far up Palolo Valley, steeped in the perfume of *Maile,* drenched by the quick showers from the clouds swept over the lofty ridge of the mountains, Israel Simms found the head of the Penn Missions. His first sight of her caught the slender figure of a girl in pure white, with unruly hair and stormy eyes. He stopped, ankle deep in the lush grass, and stared at her with his weary, steady gaze. Then he took off his hat and bowed stiffly.

"I received your note, Captain," she said quietly. "I postponed making final arrangements with Mr. Hinderwick until I had heard what the Southern Mail had to say."

Simms nodded and stepped up beside Miss Adamson. "Maybe I am here under a misunderstanding," he said slowly. "I thought you were a missionary."

Miss Adamson's face flushed faintly. "I am the head of the Penn Missions," she said with dignity. "We are connected with no church. We try to do work that is not done by sectarians."

Simms turned and looked out and down the luxuriant valley to the sea. "There is a good deal for you to do," he remarked.

"That is just it," she returned. "I felt that the steamship company ought to understand that it isn't money that is needed so tremendously as it is money got the right way."

"Our line is honest," he said briefly. "Miss Barstow—"

"I have heard of Miss Barstow," was the response. "But being raised as she was, a millionaire and society man's daughter, she does not understand or care about what we are doing. How can I build schools and teach poor natives to be sober and honest and decent

when they know that our ships are loaded every voyage with the things I am fighting against? And they *do* know that the money we spend comes from the Southern Mail."

Simms nodded gravely. "Anyway, I am here to help you," he said simply. "The company doesn't care so much about the stock as it does about you."

"Then let it instantly refuse freight consisting of evil things," Miss Adamson answered. "Only the other day a woman whose husband we have been making take care of her came to me and told me the man was drunk again and had spent his wages. He got drunk on liquor brought down on the *Maharajah.*"

"And Mr. Hinderwick promises to stop that?" he inquired.

"He is very kind and sympathetic," she returned. "He understands the work we are doing."

Simms nodded. "He understands very well," he answered. "I'm afraid I don't. But I do honestly want to do what you think best, whether I understand it or not."

"How can you?" she demanded.

CAPTAIN SIMMS stepped over to a long chair and pushed it toward her. "How can I do what you think best? I have been used for a good many years to doing things other people thought best," he said. "I am expert at it."

Miss Adamson reluctantly seated herself. "That shows that you came down here merely to see that I didn't force the company to do the right thing. I tell you now that you will fail."

"Oh, I may fail in that," he admitted. "But that doesn't seem to be my chief business just now."

"What *is your* important business, Captain?" Her tone was chilly.

Captain Simms looked thoughtfully seaward, standing easily against a vine-clad pillar. Unwillingly his hostess glanced at his strong figure and stout shoulders. When he spoke, she flushed deeply.

"I studied your photograph all the way down here," he began. "I've met a good many ladies in my time, both good and bad. Usually I can tell 'em apart promptly. But you aren't so easily described."

Miss Adamson half rose, an expression of outraged dignity on her face. "How dare you!" she whispered.

"Dare?" Simms asked quietly. "There is nothing daring about that, is there? You have been pretty solid with Mr. Hinderwick. *I* know Hinderwick, and so does my company. When they told me you were hand in glove with the agent of the All-Seas, I laughed at Penn Missions. I knew the kind of folks Hinderwick is pals with. Then I saw your picture." He turned to her gravely. "Other folks wont believe you aren't getting a heap of money to play into Hinderwick's hand and spoil an honorable concern. I reckon nobody would believe you if you kept up your play about the Penn Missions. But I have an idea you're straight. And that's my business here—to prove to you that you *are* straight."

"You—you are insulting!" she faltered, almost crying.

"I?" he asked. "No, it's Hinderwick that's insulting. Here he picks you out, knowing you're just down from the States and bound on your mission work, and he says to himself, 'She'll help me break up the Southern Mail.' So he offers you money for your stock, and you agree. That's the plain facts, except that now you're trying to hold us up for more money than the shares are worth. That's the way it looks to outsiders. I know differently. So I'm here to give you a chance to be straight."

Swiftly Miss Adamson was on her feet and confronting him. "You are insulting!" she said, flaming. "You!"

ISRAEL SIMMS looked at her, and she saw genuine compassion in his eyes. "You are very beautiful," he said simply. "You are ignorant and foolish. You are the kind to make a game like Hinderwick's worth while. I've beaten him before at his own game. I'm going to beat him now."

"And get that stock?" she taunted him.

Simms waved his hand in a gesture at once deprecating and imperious. "Not the stock," he said. "You."

"Me?" she gasped.

"You," he repeated firmly. "Look here, Miss Adamson." He pulled a photograph from an inside pocket and held it before her with kindly reverence. "This picture was taken before you left your home in Pennsylvania to take charge of the mission your aunt established. I got this from the office. I wanted to study what kind of woman it was who was playing Hinderwick's game. The other people just looked at it and saw you were beautiful and let it go at that. I saw deeper. It's up to you to prove I'm right."

Involuntarily and with shy reluctance she drew a little nearer to him. "You know, then, that all my life I have had to fight against—against the things men saw in my face?"

Simms nodded. "I was brought up strictly myself—in Pennsylvania," he said. "And I turned out to be a pirate. I've led a bitter life. You'll lead a bitter life too—unless you forget the things you've been told are right and proper for the head of a social mission and remember yourself."

"But—I would never—you forget yourself," she retorted hotly. "I am no pirate, as you term it."

"Aren't you?" he queried. "How about holding up the Southern Mail single-handed? Even Hinderwick didn't dare to do it. He got you to do it. You're just a pirate—banking on your good looks and your position down here."

"But I am *right!*" she contended.

Simms smiled. "What does that matter, that you are right as you call it according to some strange rules of your game? What I am getting at is that your motive is really a pirate's; you want something and you go get it. You wanted to make the big Southern Mail bow down before you and you never asked whether it was right or wrong—you just went after them. The arguments in favor of your action were an afterthought of—Hinderwick's."

MISS ADAMSON looked Simms straight in the eyes. "Did your Miss Barstow tell you all this?"

The Captain was silent a moment. His expression did not change. Finally he said: "I understand. I'm down here for the Southern Mail, and I try to make you forget the company and look into your own conscience. You don't trust me—naturally. I see your point. Well, I mean what I have told you. You really can't blame the Southern Mail for refusing to accept your terms. The company can't refuse freight, and it can't pay you the price Hinderwick is willing to pay for your stock."

"One hundred thousand?" she suggested.

"It isn't worth more than seventy-five thousand," he remarked. "But I know perfectly well that if you bargain long enough, Hinderwick will pay half a million. We can't."

"Five hundred thousand dollars will put Penn Missions in a position to do everything we want to do," she responded. "I couldn't deprive my work of such a help—even for Miss Barstow."

Simms nodded. "That is the point. Hinderwick's money is tainted. His half-million would destroy your work. It's dishonest money."

"You are hired to say this," Miss Adamson said bitterly.

Israel Simms sighed. "I understand," he told her gently, bowed and departed.

He was a hundred yards down the walk before Miss Adamson remembered he still carried her photograph. She flushed wrathfully and opened her mouth to call. It seemed undignified. She refrained.

"Anyway, I'll never be bothered by him again," she thought.

But two hours later Captain Simms came back, stood before her and said: "Now I can speak freely. I cabled to San Francisco that I wouldn't stay in the company's employ. I'm a free man now."

Miss Adamson stared. "Free to do what?"

"To show you how wrong you would be to play into the hands of the secret agent of the All-Seas Trust," he returned capably. "Hinderwick is a crook. The Southern Mail is straight. Miss Barstow is—"

"Still Miss Barstow!"

Simms smiled. "She gave me your

picture. She didn't know it at the time, but when she did that she asked for my resignation. She has it."

MISS ADAMSON blushed. Simms smiled again at her gusty bewilderment. "You wonder what I am going to do?"

"I don't see what business it is of yours," she faltered under his warm eyes.

"Just now I am quitting the Southern Mail for Penn Missions," he answered. "You cost me my job. It's your duty to give me another."

"But—it is ridiculous!"

"Not at all," Captain Simms returned. "You have a couple of schooners you use for mission work. Let me be your superintendent. I want no wages," he continued hastily. "I have twenty-five thousand dollars saved up. My contribution!"

"But you know nothing of the work we are trying to do," Miss Adamson persisted, suddenly struck with the fact that the offer was made in good faith.

"I have found out a lot," he replied. "You have taken over the care of a dozen islands down on the Line; you've interested the various powers in your school and hospital schemes, and you've rather gone bail that your natives wont misbehave. Well and good! But here's your schooner *Rainbow* slamming into port with old Captain Rankin yelling for a cruiser to go down and pacify Iris Island and convince the old native chief that he mustn't sell his people away to the plantations of Kraus & Ward. Rankin is all right as skipper of a peaceful missionary craft; he'll never manage the Iris Island mess. You must have me."

Miss Adamson seated herself. "That is all true about Captain Rankin," she murmured. "How did you know? That's one reason I needed Mr. Hinderwick's help. He is *so* capable."

Simms smiled grimly. "So he is. But Mr. Hinderwick has been known for years as the smoothest manipulator and schemer in the big shipping business. You may believe me when I tell you that he cares more for Kraus & Ward than he does for your work on Iris. Now, I—"

For long minutes Lucy Abigail Adamson sat still. When at length she lifted her eyes to meet his, Simms stirred.

"If you betray my trust, I'll never trust any man again," she said with perfect simplicity.

Simms rose, holding out his strong hand. "I go bail for Iris Island's obedience," he answered.

Miss Adamson flushed. "You will be kind to the natives? They are children, really."

THREE months later Israel Simms sat once more on Miss Adamson's *lanai*. Far below them, swimming on the smooth, glowing surface of the bay, rode the schooner *Rainbow*, showing no signs of her long voyagings.

The head of the Penn Missions stood on the edge of the top step, as if poised for flight.

"I couldn't help doing it," Simms explained.

"But—but everybody says it was piracy!" she protested.

"What could I do? Kraus & Ward had eight hundred of the poor devils working on that other island and defied me to go back of their labor contracts, all sealed and signed by various consuls. Nothing for it but to land, grab the Iris Islanders and put to sea. They're back home now; the old chief has learned his lesson, and your school is jammed to the doors."

Miss Adamson tried hard not to smile—vainly. But she quickly assumed a serious expression again.

"They told me about an awful fight you had," she continued. "Mr. Hinderwick was very much disturbed. He said it would mean international complications, especially if that man you wounded died."

"He wont die," Simms answered curtly. "Anyway, he nearly got me first."

Miss Adamson glanced unwillingly at the white scar that marked the Captain's browned cheek. Before she knew it, she had met his steady eyes. Her face gained a faint color. "Do you think this is the way to help our missions?" she demanded. "By fighting and bullying?"

"Maybe not," he admitted. "But it's the only way to help you. This is no idle picnic ground you're superintending. It's a big piece of a very wicked world. School and civilization are all very well. I'm enthusiastic for them. But you need my help in getting ready for them."

"Not any more," she said with decision. "You can go back to the Southern Mail and Miss Barstow."

CAPTAIN SIMMS considered this awhile. "By the way," he inquired presently, "did you dispose of your stock in the Southern Mail to Mr. Hinderwick?"

Miss Adamson glanced curiously at her visitor and then drew out a letter.

"I wrote to her telling her my position," she said primly. "I fear Miss Barstow is not only worldly but forward. She wrote me a very impertinent letter."

"And what did she say?" he demanded.

The letter fluttered down into his hand. Simms read it slowly:

SAN FRANCISCO, 1st August.

Dear Miss Lucy Abigail Adamson:

Captain Simms is, as you justly say, a valuable man. The loss of his services is regretted by this company, but under the circumstances we felt that you have first claim on him.

Faithfully yours,
ANGELA BARSTOW.

P. S. Congratulations.

Simms folded it up. "Not a word about that stock," he murmured.

"Nothing at all," Miss Adamson answered.

"What does she mean by congratulating you?" he went on.

"I suppose because she thinks I won you away from her company," was the reply.

"*Is* there no chance of your asking me to have supper?" demanded Simms.

ANGELA BARSTOW sat at the big desk in the offices of the Southern Mail. Ezekiel Ames stood before her like a truant.

"Simms merely resigned and sailed for Iris Island," he repeated. "You saw the cable. For three months I've been trying to get hold of him, and when I do, all the answer I get to my messages is that he's permanently resigned. I told you long ago not to trust him too much. Now we've lost out."

Angela lifted her eyes. "Lost out? I have the stock right here—sent back to me with a snippy note from this Lucy Abigail person. The company won, Captain Ezekiel. Trust Simms!"

Ames glared uncomfortably. "Well, now! Sent that stock Hinderwick wanted right to you! Lemme have it, and I'll—"

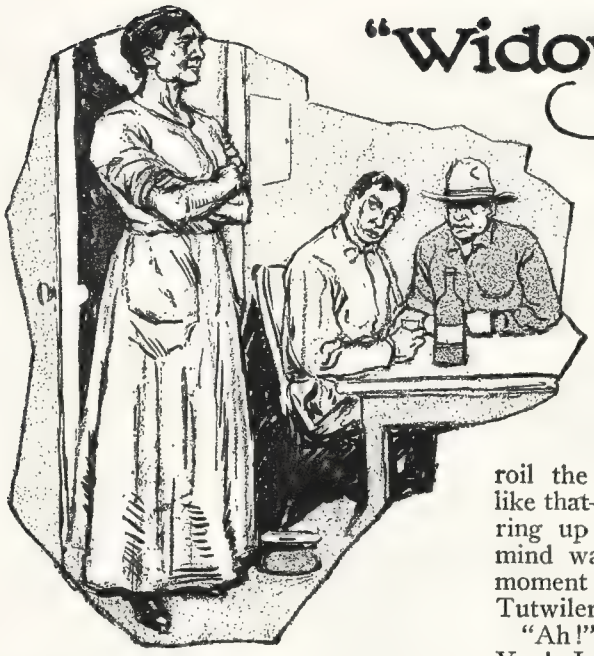
Angela laid a firm hand over the certificate. "It goes back on the next mail steamer. The Southern Mail won, but I'm a good loser."

"Loser? Loser?" quavered the old man. "How?"

Angela smiled and flipped the certificate to a waiting stenographer. "It came as a present from Lucy Abigail Adamson to Angela Barstow. It goes back a wedding present from the Southern Mail to Mrs. Lucy Abigail Simms."

BY THE AUTHOR OF "TARZAN"

"THE OAKDALE AFFAIR," a thrilling novelette that could have been written by no one else than Edgar Rice Burroughs, author of "The New Stories of Tarzan," will be published complete in our next issue. And it's just one of the many features which will make our March issue—on sale February 1st—the most interesting magazine you ever read.



"Widow, Widow!"

by William R. Lighton and Louis Duryea Lighton

THE day when the Widow Pulsatilla married Red McGee was one of Cupid's days off. Cupid had nothing whatever to do with the business; the Widow Schwartz managed it herself. She was quite a "manager" too, according to her say-so. But for all her managerial genius, she had grown a bit weary and a bit dismayed over the thankless responsibility of making a living for herself and her four left-over children, with nobody else to blame when things went wrong. She wanted a man; just any sort of man—which was just exactly what she got when she married Red McGee.

The Reverend S. Arthur Tutwiler, making his first round of pastoral calls in Redstone, found McGee squatting upon the sunlit kitchen doorstep, smoking a cigarette and moodily contemplating the gambols of the four little Schwartz girls in the sandy back yard. If you stretched a point, you might say that Red was thinking things over. With Red, thinking wasn't a process; it was merely a condition. Did you ever notice a warm, shallow mud puddle full of polliwogs in commotion? Their maddest tail-wriggling doesn't get them anywhere; it does no more than roil the puddle. Red's thinking was like that—a lot of futile squirming, stirring up the dregs of his mind. His mind was pretty well muddied at the moment when the Reverend S. Arthur Tutwiler came upon him.

"Ah!" said the visitor. "Mr. McGee? Yes! I am the Reverend Mr. Tutwiler. I find your good wife enrolled as a member of my flock. Is Mrs. McGee within?"

Since the Reverend Tutwiler said "Ah!" perhaps there was no good reason why Red shouldn't say "Aw!" So he said, "Aw, the widow aint home." He said it without rising from the doorsill, without removing his handmade cigarette from the corner of his drooping mouth. The saying was without enthusiasm; neither was it hostile; its tone was listless, dull.

"Ah!" said S. Arthur, and paused. He was a stranger to Wyoming and its ways, but he had learned not to be too inquisitive. He did not press for the intimate meaning of Red's speech, but turned to ground that seemed to give a safe footing. "These little ones are yours, I presume?"

Dully Red scanned the four little girls standing in a staring row.

"Indirectly," he said. "They're her'n."

"Ah, yes!" said Tutwiler. Red withheld further revelation. "Will—will your lady return soon, perhaps?" Tutwiler questioned.

"Plenty soon for me," Red said. "Mebbe not soon enough for you. "She's went over to the Widow

Welch's to talk about liquor. When them two get to talkin' about liquor—"

The Reverend Tutwiler ventured a syllable of mild laughter. "Yes, yes! A remarkable woman, Mrs. Welch—capable and—vigorous and—uncompromising and — and — a remarkable woman!"

RED didn't answer that. There were times when Red felt that his vocabulary was woefully deficient. This was one of the times. He turned a dull glance upon the visitor's face, but kept silence. Suddenly, in silence, he took his cigarette from his lips and surreptitiously dropped it upon the sand beside the steps; then in awkward self-consciousness he stood up and gave a hitch to his clothing.

"Aw, there's Pulsatilla a-comin' now," he said.

She came—a square-built woman of beefy solidity. Her mouth was uncommonly large, her eyes uncommonly small. "Managing" women have an appearance all their own. Beautiful women aren't the only women who win the deference of men-folks. Women like Pulsatilla command it too—on the theory of safety first. Even the Reverend S. Arthur Tutwiler shuffled a bit uneasily upon his feet while he waited, watching Pulsatilla's approach. Red frankly sagged as he met her coldly accusing glance. That glance of hers had a way of making his shortcomings break out upon the surface of his mind like a prickly rash. He realized now that he had received the visitor at the kitchen door and had rudely left him to stand. The cigarette-butt beside the steps smoldered and smoked betrayal. Red stood unshaven, untidy, a discredit. These things would be talked over privately in due time; for the present, Pulsatilla's glance was withering. Red watched his chance, slipped out by the back way and drifted downtown.

He went into the bar of the Redstone Hotel. He had no money for a drink. Pulsatilla always took care of that. He dared not drink, anyway—on Pulsatilla's account. But the bar offered companionship in the late afternoons—understanding male companionship. Red was sadly in need of rough male contacts.

A CONFERENCE was in progress around one of the card-tables with a couple of bottles and a ring of glasses. It was rather a notable gathering. Bud Kennedy, the substantial owner of the New York Emporium, was there; so was Beckett K. McGillicuddy, Redstone's banker; so was Orson J. Pruitt, the big cowman from down-country; so was Billy Fortune; and there were lesser odds and ends of conferees — a round dozen. Obviously something of importance was under discussion. Red shuffled up to listen.

"Redstone goin' dry!" Orson J. Pruitt was saying. "Oh, lovely! It's goin' to happen, too, lemme tell you, unless you lads get action. If it does, I'm done. Me trade in a dry town, when there's wet ones handy? Not any! I'll shift all my tradin' over to Musky in a minute. So will every stockman in the country. If you let Redstone dry up, she'll just blow clean off the map."

He spoke earnestly, without humor, in the manner of prophets of calamity. There followed an uneasy pause.

"Oh, shucks!" Billy Fortune ventured. "Redstone aint goin' dry. It's nothin' but a mess of women's talk."

Pruitt turned a stern eye upon Billy. "What? Women's talk? It aint no such a thing. It aint *women*. It's the Widow Welch—that's who it is. Don't you lads make no mistake about that. If it was just a mess of women—but it aint. It's the Widow Welch."

There fell another brief interval of silence. Bud Kennedy brought his jackknife from his pocket, opened his favorite whittling blade and began cutting a row of small, even notches along the edge of the pine table-top. With Bud, whittling was always a preliminary of serious speech.

"I aint aimin' to say," he ventured conservatively, "whether Orse is right or wrong. The Widow Welch, she trades at the Emporium, and she pays cash. I wouldn't want to say nothin' to lose her custom. But I wouldn't wonder if Orse is right. The Widow Welch, she sure is one whiz of a woman."

"What's she doin' it for?" One of the lesser folk proposed the question. "I wisht you'd tell me what's it to her. She aint got ary man that's bein' hurt by drinkin'. What's it to her?"

"Aw!" Red McGee, leaning his slack shoulders against the wall beside the table, contributed his mite. "It aint because she's got anything against liquor. It's just because she hates to see anybody enjoyin' theirselves. I reckon you aint had any experience with widows. Pulsatilla— Aw!" He succumbed to the inadequacy of words.

Glasses were filled and emptied upon that. Orson J. Pruitt wiped his lips upon the back of his hand.

"What's the sense of tryin' to explain it?" he challenged. "The Widow Welch, she don't need explainin'; she needs somethin' done. You take pretty near any woman, and if you wait until you've got her explained to suit you, it's goin' to be too late—whatever it is. It aint but a couple of weeks till this thing comes to a vote. If action aint took to head her off, she's goin' to put the dry hoodoo on Redstone. Now, I'm tellin' you!"

BECKETT K. MCGILLICUDDY, teetering upon the hind legs of his chair, his hat cocked rakishly over one eye, grinned in vast enjoyment. Beckett had neither wife nor widow; and Beckett's invariable tipple was Vichy; so his interest was quite disinterested. He tilted his hat over the other eye, and his pale eyes squinted.

"The lady banks with me," he said. "If you want to know the inmost soul of a woman, don't act as her father-confessor; act as her banker. She'll hold out on her confessor in little matters of transgressions and moral lapses, if she happens to feel like it; but when it comes to the large concern of her dollars—gentlemen, hush! The Widow Welch, gentlemen, is—what shall I say?—a most masterful woman! You might even call her headstrong—as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile!"

"Aw!" said Red McGee. "That's the widow of her. It aint just headstrongness; it's deceivin'ness besides. Aint I livin' with one of 'em? Pulsatilla—even her name's deceivin'. I used to think *Pulsatilla* was a right pretty name for a woman till I found out that *Pulsatilla* means a dose of medicine. She don't deceive her name none, though—that's one thing I'll say for her."

But Kennedy laughed—a rare indulgence. Kennedy never laughed aloud save under the stimulus of an extra drink or two. To-day he had had two or three beyond his usual temperate allowance, in concession to a grave occasion. He was beginning to take the humorist's odd, slantwise view of the matter. Most likely Bud was something of a humorist by nature; but the cares of the foremost business man of Redstone had repressed the gift. Perhaps you've noticed that when a native instinct, long repressed, reawakens under the spell of alcohol, it's very apt to frisk and cavort with the best. Bud's laughter carried a sardonic note.

"Wouldn't it be comical," he said, "if all the women was widows to start with? We wouldn't stand no more chance than — no more chance — no more—"

His speech was stricken with sudden blight. The street door swung open under the touch of a vigorous hand, and the room was all at once filled by a Presence, the company at the table swept by an Eye.

THE WIDOW WELCH was no Joan of Arc, crusading under divine inspiration. The Widow Welch wasn't fashioned for martyrdom. One look at her made that notion grotesque. She wasn't one of those who will follow a conviction into the last ditch—nothing like that! With her, the virtue of any cause would be merely incidental to the business of "having her way." "Masterful"—that's the word for her. Her big, bony frame was more than masculine; her big, bony face would have made a corking figurehead for a pirate ship in the days when pirating was at its zenith. It would have made a ripping gargoyle for the city hall of a Midwestern town, built in the days of contractors' graft. You might fairly say that the Eye summed up all the rest of the face. It was a prominent

gray Eye—not blue-gray, mind you, nor slate-gray, nor gray-green, but just plain, cold, uncompromising gray—cold and gray and glittering as the blade of a drawn sword. There was no more depth in its coldness than the surface of a sword-blade shows.

The Presence stood over the company at the table; the Eye picked out the company's members slowly, one by one, with the manner of inexorable doom. The Widow swept the assembly with a masterfully inclusive gesture.

"I wish you to observe those who make up the opposition element," she said. Her voice was a metallic baritone. She wasn't speaking to the men at the table, but to the Reverend S. Arthur Tutwiler, trailing along in the background. Until that moment, when the Widow's address brought him into relief, he hadn't been noticed. He hadn't come here of his own will; the Widow had fetched him. Now that he was here, he did his diplomatic best to smile two ways at once—propitiatingly at his leader, apologetically at the tableful of men. The Widow's arm was outstretched; her big chin was thrust up.

"Observe well!" she commanded. "Here are the men who corrupt Redstone. Here is Redstone's vileness. Fix these men in your memory." S. Arthur smirked wretchedly from one to another. "Come!" ordered the Widow. "If you have finished, let us go."

NO man spoke, upon the Widow's militant exit. Without prompting, as upon common-need, elbows crooked. Bud Kennedy cleared his throat with a good deal of noise; then boldly he took up his interrupted laugh.

"Jiminy!" he said. "Jimi-nently!"

"There!" said Orson J. Pruitt. "That's who you've got to beat. It aint Prohybition you're up against; it's that there woman. What about it?"

Billy Fortune's happy-go-lucky mind caught at a stray fancy.

"I wish her husband was here," he said lightly. "He could tell us a few things, mebbe." He chuckled over the conceit. "Wouldn't you relish havin' a look at him, to see what kind he was that could ever have made love to her? What do you reckon he said to her while he was doin' it? It must have sounded real quaint."

Somehow the company felt the need of further fortification. Bud Kennedy was getting quite a string of drinks to the good. None but Beckett K. McGillicuddy was wholly equal to sober calculation now. Beckett spread his hands upon the table to catch and hold attention.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "here's a wise old saying: 'Deliberate with caution; act with decision.' We're deliberating like a bunch of silly sheep, and we aren't acting at all. The Widow Welch is acting. I'm with Orse on that proposition. If we never start, we're liable to make a poor finish."

"Aw!" droned the melancholy McGee. "The man don't live that could make anything but a poor finish if there's a widow in it anywheres."

"Shucks!" Billy Fortune protested. "That aint so at all. A widow's humaner than anybody, if you just use judgment. Listen here: You've got her sized up terrible wrong. Just because she's got a hooked nose and talks bass, you're scared of her, and it's took your judgment away. You're aimin' to fight her same as you'd fight a man. Sufferin' Peter! That's no way! You can't beat a woman by fightin' her. Fightin' her just keeps her mind on the thing you're wantin' her to forget. The only way in this world to beat a woman at any game that ever was played is to get her thinkin' about somethin' else. If that wasn't so easy, us men would be in a bad, bad fix."

BILLY had attention—rapt attention, you might say. Orson J. Pruitt's manner was solemnly retrospective.

"Darned if that aint pretty near correct," he said without levity. "Yes sir, when my wife—"

"Sure it's correct!" Billy interrupted. "Why do you reckon a woman can't play poker? She's got the intellects, and she's got the nerve; but while she's lookin' at her chips, she forgets what she's holdin'; and if she cinches her attention onto her cards, she forgets to watch the other man's face; and if you

start a little conversation with her, she forgets all three of 'em. They're all that way. Even if she is a man for looks, this widow-woman is just exactly the same as all the rest of 'em. If we commence fightin' with her about whisky, she's goin' to lick us, and she's goin' to lick us good. That's just the very thing we don't want to do. We want to start her off on somethin' else."

"Darned if I don't believe that's pretty near correct," said Orson J. Pruitt. He considered for a moment, ponderously. His experience with life had been mostly through the medium of the cow-business. The cow-business had trained his mind to stick pretty close to the solid earth; his imagination was clumsy in flight. "Beck," he said to McGillicuddy, "if you could get her scared for fear the bank was goin' to bust up—"

"Oh, gee whiz, no!" Billy protested. "That's too humdrum. That wouldn't be funny, either. Say, listen: if we could hire somebody to start makin' love to her—"

Undeniably, Bud Kennedy had had too much to drink. An unwonted deep flush showed through his heavy tan; an unwonted sparkle lighted his habitually cool, steady eyes; a fixed grin was upon his wide lips. He had even forgotten his whittling. His hand fell upon the table with a crashing thump.

"Now you're tootin'!" he cried. There was a stir in the company. Chairs hitched closer, and somebody reached for a bottle.

Alcohol had not quite overwhelmed Orson J. Pruitt's lifelong habit of thrift. "Hire somebody?" he said. "It would take an awful lot of money."

Yes, Bud Kennedy had had too much to drink. He beat upon the table with both hands, and his voice rose.

"It wont take a cent!" he shouted. "I'll do it myself. I'll do it for the glory. I aint got any women-folks to kick. I've been 'tendin' to business too close, anyway. I'm needing a little variety. I'll make love to the lady myself."

Imps of daredevil delight danced in Billy's eyes.

"You Bud!" he approved. "Oh, you Bud! You wouldn't ever do it! After this whisky's gone dead in you—"

Kennedy was vociferous. "I aint goin' to let it go dead in me. What's the sense of drinkin', if I'm goin' to let it go dead without usin' it? I'm startin' right away. You watch me! You think I wont do it; but you watch me! Let's have another one before I go change my clothes. You just watch me!"

Red McGee, standing bone-dry,—on Pulsatilla's account,—spoke in accents disconsolate.

"Aw, say, Bud, I wouldn't! If you'd had experience—"

"You just watch me!" Kennedy urged with heavy reiteration.

ALL Redstone watched. It was a notable spectacle they looked upon. You would hardly have called the affair a courtship, for even the most conventional courtship must carry something of ardor and something of suspense and something of the savor of dramatic intensity. Redstone had no chance at all to judge of Bud Kennedy's art as a wooer; the action was too soon over. The Widow Welch merely annexed him, out of hand. When business opened at the Emporium on the morning after the conference, Bud was in his place, sobered, a bit shaken, more than a bit worried and altogether silent. His was a silence that no importunity could violate. There was no need that he should talk. The Widow Welch gave the news to Redstone; by noon it was on every tongue. Try as he would, no man could get a word out of Bud. Even Billy Fortune's audacious insistence was impotent.

"But, great Scott, Bud!" Billy protested. "What's the use of actin' like this? Open up and tell us."

Bud studied Billy somberly; then his eyes filmed over with a veil of reticence.

"No," he said dully. "You wait! I'm doin' this." And there disclosure halted and balked stubbornly.

The Widow Welch's campaign didn't halt; it didn't so much as hesitate. Indeed, it gained in vigor and fervor. When a week was gone, Billy Fortune voiced the common puzzlement.

"It sure does look as if we'd misjudged the lady," he said. "That just can't be, though. Bud Kennedy, he's the trouble. What do you reckon he's up to? If he'd only talk some!"

But Bud wouldn't talk. What's more, he wouldn't drink, and he wouldn't explain that new oddity of behavior. Neither art nor artlessness could get a word out of him, save as he repeated over and over again, wearily, stolidly, his own cryptic saying: "You wait! I'm doin' this. I know what I'm doin'."

REDSTONE went "dry" by a narrow squeak. A single vote did the business. One vote! But neither zeal nor craft could change it. There it stood, that one inexorable vote. When there was no least chance for doubt, Bud Kennedy turned up at the Redstone Hotel bar.

Melancholy sat with the company at the card-table. Melancholy did not rise when Bud dropped into his chair.

"Whisky!" Bud ordered and he poured till his glass brimmed over. When his drink was down, he surveyed his mates with lackluster eye. He brought out his jackknife, but suffered it to lie idle in his nerveless hand. He hadn't the heart for whittling.

"It's got to be told to you," he said by and by. "That there vote was mine. It was me that voted Redstone dry."

No one spoke. There was nothing to be said. Listlessly Bud took up his tale.

"It was all on account of—of—you know what! I went and done just like I said I was goin' to. I must have had the full of a pint in me, and I went right straight up there and started. I never done nothin' but just start; I never got a chance, because the next thing I knowed she had her big hooked nose in my eye and was kissin' me. Yes sir—kissin' me! Lemme have another drink."

He did not stint his pouring. In the depths of his dulled eyes a flicker of fire gleamed.

"I've just been up there, seein' her," he said heavily. "I've been buyin' her off. It cost me three thousand—three thousand, cold cash. And she kissed me besides! And all just because I happened to have a pint of whisky in me. Say, listen! If whisky will do a man like that, it's bad! That's what I says to myself. 'If whisky'll do me like that,' I says, 'it aint safe.' And so I voted dry."

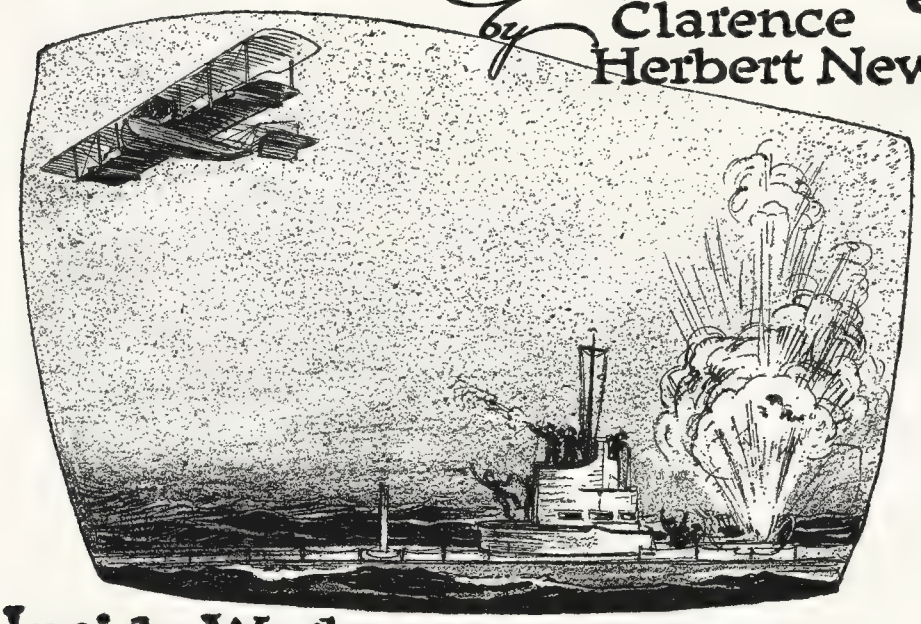
No comment was made over the table. There were but two words of adequate comment spoken in Redstone when the story got about. The Reverend S. Arthur Tutwiler said "Ah!" mildly, perplexedly. Red McGee said "Aw!" with profound feeling.

THERE WILL BE ONLY THREE—

"THE CONQUERING WOMAN," that delightful novel by Stanley Shaw which begins in next month's BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, will be published complete in three generous installments. It is an exceptionally engaging story of love, mystery and business, the scenes laid in New York and in the Canadian mining country. Be sure to read the first engrossing installment, for the author of "The Siren of the Snows" has surpassed himself in this story. It will appear in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale February 1st.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

by Clarence Herbert New



Inside Work

"SOMEWHERE on the North Atlantic," a big food-and-munition ship rammed her nose through the oily black waves at the top fraction of the sixteen knots that her reconstructed engines gave her. The lookouts couldn't see the water a hundred feet ahead through the fog, and though they listened constantly for the faintest indication of another craft in their immediate vicinity, they knew perfectly well that nothing afloat would blow a siren or intentionally betray her position. If anything happened to be on their course in that fog, they'd hit it—that was all. And if their collision-bulkhead happened to hold, by good luck, they might pick up some of the other crew. If they happened to be the ones hit, on bow or quarter—good night! Or rather, good morning—four bells in the forenoon watch. Occasionally the lookouts and the mate at the end of the bridge glanced back at the frequently obscured window, aft of the wheel-house, which furnished what light there was to the operator in the wireless-room. With the new auxiliary code, it was possible to hint at positions and known dangers by a single word.

A mile to the north a long, lean destroyer slipped through the water like a smoke-colored ghost—invisible at half her length even when the sun, somewhere overhead, made the fog partly luminous. Just before it shut down, a series of flags on the signal-yard had given the course as E. by N. ½ N.—and this had been synchronized for the two boats, as also had been the speed. There was, of course, a chance that they might come together in the murk, but under war conditions that chance had to be taken.

Lieutenant Selfridge had the deck of the destroyer. He was chatting in low tones with his second in command when some flying object struck the forward stack, and a voice came down most amazingly from the atmosphere overhead.

"Better keep a couple of points to the no'thard for the next half-hour. Leftenant—you're within half a mile of your convoy! Watch out, or you'll pile up on her!" The last few words were

barely distinguishable as the voice trailed away in the distance.

THE expressions on the officers' faces were ludicrous as they stared upward with open mouths.

"Hmph! A few years ago, anybody would have said that was God! Providential advice, even now! You heard that, Jenkins? Keep her up a couple of points until I tell you to get back on the course! —That wasn't one of our crowd, Billy. It must have been one of the new British seaplanes they've been hinting about in the squadron. And how the devil he located either the convoy or us beats me. Of course, if half one hears is true, they've been doing things over there on the firing-line that are almost unbelievable. All the same, there are limitations to everything. I don't take much stock in what the Britishers are hinting about settling the submarine question with seaplanes—it's too darned impractical! Why, just before the war started, they chalked out on the ground, near Boston, the full-sized outline of a big transatlantic liner—and half a dozen birdmen tried to 'bomb' it from various heights, with oranges. I believe only two oranges out of a hundred and thirty struck inside the chalk-lines, and they were dropped from less than four hundred feet up—couldn't have missed if they'd tried!"

"Hmph! If you think they've been standing still in aviation since that time, Selfridge, you've got another guess coming! I saw the figures for three French bombing-planes when we were ashore in Plymouth, last month, and each had a record of better than sixty per cent hits—at three to five hundred meters. They've got the trajectory figured out for each hundred meters of altitude at varying speeds—each time they drop a bomb, it's a sort of problem in trig. For instance, say you're three hundred meters up, and going a hundred miles an hour. You'd pull the catch that released the bomb when you were at least three hundred meters back of a point directly over the object you intended to hit. The bomb would retain a part of your own forward speed through the air, as it fell, until the atmospheric resistance overcame it."

WHILE the two officers were discussing the progress of aviation, a great cruising-plane with a hundred-and-twenty-foot spread of wings, which had passed over them at a leisurely forty-mile clip, drove majestically on through the fog like an antediluvian eagle—invisible, noiseless, owing to a cleverly designed muffler on the exhaust. At the wheel, in the pilot's seat, was a trim boyish figure in a fleece-lined suit of leather. The face was animated —handsome. The brown eyes, partly closed, gleamed with the keen, far-sighted glance of a hawk. Something in that glance, in the whole poise of the figure, would have struck one as vaguely familiar. But it would have taken several guesses to recognize, in that costume and under such conditions, one of the most famous women in Europe —Nan, Countess of Dyvnaint. In the fuselage back of her was a muscular, active man who had been flying-companion and chief mechanician to both the Trevors for many years—Mr. Harry Archer. With him, were three men to operate the wonderful M-Ray light, microtelephone, wireless and aërial torpedoes.

After leaving the destroyer, Her Ladyship gave the two big motors extra gas and speeded up to better than a hundred miles an hour. When they had kept this up for thirty-five minutes and were a good seventy miles east of the convoy, she throttled down again and eased the plane gently to a lower level.

"Harry!" she called. "I'm going to roost on the surface awhile and let down the submarine telephone. That's a game we can play as well as the boches themselves!"

In a moment or two, the top of a vast deep-sea wave, half a mile long, surged ponderously up through the mist. Her Ladyship followed its broad slope into the trough, tipped her elevator gently and slid up on the shoulder of the next wave as smoothly as if the plane had been a gigantic sleigh. The splash was scarcely perceptible as the pontoons touched the water.

When the monster albatross was at rest upon the slowly heaving ocean, riding the billows with the lightness of cork, the Countess got slowly out of her

pilot's seat and walked aft, stretching the fatigue out of her limbs as she went. Archer and McTavish were lowering, thirty feet under water, a square water-proof case in the four sides of which were twelve-inch diaphragms, sensitized by the electro-magnets behind them to a degree which recorded any sound through the water within a hundred-mile radius. From each of the diaphragms wires led upward through the cable to a four-point switch connected with the electro-magnetic detector of the wireless outfit. So by shutting off one diaphragm after another, the maximum intensity of the recorded sound indicated the compass-point from which it was coming, and the approximate distance.

McTavish sat down with the receivers clamped over his ears for an hour of listening; but in a moment or two they saw by the expression of his face that he was getting something. Adjusting duplicate head-frames, both her Ladyship and Archer listened in—there was no mistaking the regular beat of a screw approaching them from the south. From the recurring impulses of the thrust,—shorter and snappier than those of the average steamer,—they were sure the craft must be a submersible. It wasn't fast enough for a destroyer—and the pulsations were more like those from Diesel motors than from storage batteries. Hence the submarine, if it was one, seemed to be traveling on the surface and approaching the course which the convoy and the destroyer were following.

By making the adjustment a little finer, the screws of both craft could be distinctly heard, seventy miles away, but the U-boat screw was louder and consequently nearer. While they were listening, the approaching craft settled the question of her own identity by rapping out a code sentence in "Continental" upon an under-water bell recessed in the curve of her bilge. Once or twice they thought they could make out an answering bell at the limit of their radius; but as the same sentence was repeated, over and over, they decided that the Hun's attempts to communicate with some other submersible had been unsuccessful. And for obvious reasons they were not trying to use wireless.

AT the end of an hour the beat of the screw was so much louder that the craft appeared to be within a thousand feet; then it stopped. In the fog, with its strata of varying densities, it was impossible to judge exactly how near she might be; and those on the plane were itching to locate her with sufficient accuracy for a sudden and unexpected attack. Starting the motors very slowly, Her Ladyship headed the plane in the direction from which they had last heard the beating of the screw, and they glided along the surface on the pontoons, stopping every few moments to listen. Presently they seemed to catch a faint echo of voices through the mist. In absolute silence they connected a microphone—with a megaphone receiver—to the electro-magnetic detector and found themselves overhearing voices on the deck of a U-boat as distinctly as if they were less than twenty feet away. Occasionally a thickening of the fog-strata made the voices a trifle less distinct, but not enough so to prevent understanding of what was said. Three of the five among the plane's crew spoke German fluently.

"How much time have we, Herr Lieutenant—before the *Schweine* come up to us?"

"That, precisely, is not known. We have been hearing their screws through our untersee telephone for the last two hours. Probably the convoy of which Schaefer tried to warn us before he was arrested. It is all in our game, of course—but the pig-dogs are fools. They content themselves with arrests instead of executions. Hundreds of our men who now should be dead, by every chance of scientific warfare, have managed to escape and to give us even more valuable information. They are imbeciles, these money-mad Yankees. It is to swear! However, my calculations cannot be mistaken. They are on a course which puts them directly on top of us in this spot. Shift the motor-gears to your dynamo-shaft and keep charging the batteries until I tell you to stop! It should be at least three hours before they are up with us; in

this fog we can get almost alongside. One thing more—keep your air-compressors going."

"You think they have no suspicion of what we are planning for the winter, Herr Lieutenant?"

"None whatever! They have not brains enough! The Yankee secret service! It is to laugh! They have suspicion that bombs have been placed upon a few ships before they left port—and they hold some of our men in detention-camps while it is tried to prove it. But they do not dream of our systematic campaign in every Atlantic port. Look you, Franz! Three quarters of all the tug-captains on the Yankee coast are Scandinavians who sympathize with us most perfectly. More than half the stevedores and coal-handlers are either Scandinavians, Poles or Hungarians. In New York alone there are thousands in our pay at this moment, in addition to our own men who pass as Irish, Danish, Greeks or Belgians. We have a kindling-wood factory and large coal-yard near the Brooklyn water-front, where we have stored large quantities of steaming coal in which we have been speculating. In such coal, there frequently are lumps bigger than the heads of two men.

"*Donner!* Again it is to laugh! You should see the infernal machines which our chemists make in that factory of kindling-wood, and conceal with an outer covering of coal that would anyone deceive—it is impossible to distinguish them from the big lumps, and they cannot explode until the clockwork sets the connection. They had better watch the coal which goes into their bunkers, most carefully, through the winter, my good Franz! And even were all their noses close to it, we still would have means of placing bombs and machines in other parts of the steamers. Our U-boats will get much credit which they have not earned before spring—and at far less than the cost of building even one!"

"We in the French and Mediterranean ports have the same arrangement, of course?"

"The question is foolishness! What else? The German system is always most thorough. In French ports there many stevedores and coal-handlers are who are supposed to be Belgians, Alsatians, Swiss, Gascons or Basques, yet who have been in our pay since long before the war. In Italy are many Spaniards and Portuguese who are taken for Sicilians, Maltese, or Italians from Argentina and Brazil. All is arranged. Sometimes the watch is too strict for our men to get aboard any particular ship, but there are other ships. They wait for their chance. And when that ship has been a few days at sea she is torpedoed by a submarine which is seen by nobody on board! Ha! It is to regret that one cannot always lie near and see such mysterious sinkings! Look you, Franz—in the past month, there have been five sinkings on the Atlantic which were inside jobs, and not U-boats at all!

"Day after to-morrow there will be another—the *Brunswick City* which last night left Bordeaux with a French destroyer convoying her for the first two days. In her Number 6 starboard bunker, there are eight sticks of dynamite and one machine timed to explode before eight bells Thursday night. The dynamite was laid in against the outer skin in lumps of sawdust and glue with coal packed against them. They will not explode until concussion from the machine sets them off—then they will rip from the frames the whole side-plating. The job was done from the coal-hulks alongside while the bunkers were being filled—and the two men who did it were in a cabaret that evening, drinking with two soldiers of the dock-guard. *Donner!* It is childish! But what expect you of the fools? They are not of the superior race! Knowledge is impossible to such animals!"

Here the conversation drifted off into personal gossip of women in Berlin and Hamburg. After listening for another moment or so with an expression of disgust at what she heard, Countess Nan took the receivers from her ears and detached the microphone from the instruments.

"I think that'll be about all we need to hear from those cowards! Get three or four bombs ready, Frazier! We'll go up at once and send them where they belong! Harry! You and Angus keep

repeating to yourselves every word of that information concerning the *Brunswick City* until you can't possibly forget it!"

THE great cruising-plane splashed a little water from the crest of the next billow and rose silently into the mist. Her Ladyship headed directly for the point from which the voices had come, and in a few moments, they caught the sound of voices again with their unaided ears. The plane had banked, circled and dipped fifty feet lower. As it returned, those on each craft saw each other through the mist, but there was not time for the Germans to escape the retribution in store for them. One aërial torpedo went cleanly through the open hatch, and another hit the after deck near the screw.

Her Ladyship had given her motors more gas at the instant the torpedoes were released, and had spurted up so that the plane was two hundred feet away when they exploded; but even at that distance the concussion was so great as nearly to toss the machine upside down. The Countess pulled back her steering-post, however, until the elevator sent them up at an angle of fifty degrees for a second or two—then flattened out again at a hundred-and-thirty-mile gait. Faint shouts from the water under them indicated the possibility of survivors, but they wasted no sympathy on them.

"If they manage to keep afloat for two hours, that destroyer may pick them up—they'll not be too modest to shout for help. In fact, they may be thinking they're not being treated according to Hague regulations. Well, the women and children on the *Lusitania* weren't treated that way, either—nor the men who were permitted to come aboard the U-boat which then deliberately submerged under them. Really, I'm not in a ladylike frame of mind this morning! I'm thinking of the *Brunswick City*—and whether it is possible to save her, after all!

"Angus," the Countess continued, "get your instruments connected up and begin calling our mother-ship—the *Saki Maru!* Tell Captain Leslie Flint we've to run down off the Bay of Biscay for two or three days—keeping in touch with the *Oyama Maru,* on the southern beat, until we return! His instruments are powerful enough to reach her; he must tell Leftenant Henderson we're coming, so that he'll be on the lookout for us, or listening for our wireless!—Harry, see if you can spread the chart on the floor—weight it down—and figure out where we can strike the *Oyama Maru* to-night or in the morning! She can't be more than six or seven hundred miles south of us, I fancy—and we can make that in five hours if we must. There's still enough gas for about eight. Perhaps it's safer to look for the *Hito Maru,* in between—and fill our tanks! Now let's get out of this fog. It's depressing!"

WHILE McTavish was calling their mother-ship, the big plane went soaring up through the mist, which covered so wide an area of the ocean surface that it proved unusually high before they finally broke through into the dazzling sunlight above it, the barograph registering over fifteen hundred meters. Going up until they had over two miles of altitude, they flew through a bitterly cold but crystal-clear atmosphere toward the southeast—the slowly shifting sea of mist far below them. After they had made about two hundred and eighty miles, they noticed that the fog was thinning out. In five minutes more they caught a sparkle of reflected sunlight from the ocean itself—and three of them began searching with powerful prism binoculars for trails of steamer-smoke on the horizon.

It was Golding who presently discovered a lazy U-boat taking its ease—charging its batteries with the phlegmatic assurance of a German craft in Kiel harbor. As the wings and fish-body of the plane were painted an atmospheric blue-gray, it would have been impossible for the submarine to make it out at a much lower altitude, and the crew glanced hopefully at the tense figure in the pilot-seat.

"Er—one of the brutes on the surface just ahead, your Ladyship—having an after-breakfast nap—hatches open. Couldn't have a much better chance at her!"

"We'll hunt for the beast coming back, Golding! Just now, it'll be a near thing if we make the *Hito Maru* before we run out of gas! Keep a sharp lookout for her; I fancy she'll be a bit to the east of us, but I may be mistaken!"

In half an hour they picked up a small dot on the horizon which proved to be the mother-ship for that particular "beat" or patrolled line in the danger zone, and were soon floating on their pontoons near her, while a launch brought out a length of small hose through which gasoline was pumped into their tanks.

While this was being done, Countess Nan had gone aboard to consult with the young Navy Reserve lieutenant in command of the steamer as to his approximate whereabouts, and the probable noon position of the *Brunswick City*. As the course followed after leaving Bordeaux was largely optional with her master, the best Her Ladyship could do was to establish the probable radius from the French port, reach it, approximately, in the plane, and then run down its curve until she located the returning transport. According to her figuring, in the chart-room of the *Hito Maru*, this should be a matter of not over six or eight hours at the outside. And as it most fortunately proved, it was still daylight when they shot down over the bridge of the *Brunswick City*.

FOR an hour they had been persistently calling the ship by wireless —repeating, over and over: "Dynamite and infernal machine in your Number 6 starboard bunker. Stop your engines! Search for explosives. . . . . Dynamite and infernal machine in your Number 6 starboard bunker! Stop your engines! Search for explosives! Aërial Service, Royal Navy Reserve." It was understood, of course, that the steamer would not reply on account of possible listening U-boats, but they kept reiterating the warning until they swept around and came down alongside her. The *Brunswick City's* operator had finally caught the message, but her commander didn't stop his engines until the plane was sighted, fearing the message might prove a trap to make him lie to until he could be torpedoed. The Countess boarded him as quickly as possible—against the protests of her crew, who feared the explosives might let go prematurely—and repeated the U-boat lieutenant's conversation in detail.

"According to our figuring, Captain, that clockwork is set for eight bells tomorrow night, and the fact that it hasn't gone off during the pitching you got crossing the Bay is some assurance that it wont until the contact is actually made at the prearranged time. But at that, you've less than thirty hours! We'll patrol the water around you while you're working—but you'd best go at it at once. My word!"

"Aye—no question as to the need, Your Ladyship, but it'll take a bit of doing, just the same! A ship's bunkers, d'ye see, are constructed with the idea of emptyin' 'em in just one way—through the small feed-ports, into the stoke-hold, near the furnace-doors. We take in coal through large ports in the outside plating—from canal-boats or coal-hulks alongside. But here we are at sea, with nothin' alongside to receive the coal if we attempt gettin' it out the way it came in—bunkers pitch dark an' filled with coal-dust, so we daren't take lights into 'em!"

"Of course, as a last resort," replied the Countess, "you *can* get everyone off in the boats,—abandon the ship before she goes down,—and we can fetch another ship to your assistance in a very short time." There was a faint suspicion of sarcasm in the Countess' tone—but she did the captain injustice.

"Aye—but it's not come to that just yet," he said. "I'm thinkin' the owners'll have to lose a few tons of coal, under the circumst'nces. We'll just have to risk the chance of short-circuitin' by rubbin' off the wire-insulation against the edges of the ports, an' lead a bunch of incandescents into that bunker from over the side. Then my stokers'll have to empty it with their bare hands. We can't risk havin' the sharp edge of a coal-shovel runnin' against that dynamite, d'ye see!"

TELLING the mate to have the outer port of the Number 6 bunker opened and a bunch of carefully insulated lights taken in, Captain Marshall

took Her Ladyship below to the stokehold—calling all of the Black Gang together, including those off duty.

"Lads," he said to them, "I've just learned that there's a bit of infernal machine in our Number 6 bunker—with sticks of dynamite against the old girl's skin, waitin' to be set off by it. Only way to get 'em out of her is to empty that bunker through the outside port by hand—feelin' most carefully in the loose coal for every sort of lump, an' liftin' it out as if it were eggs. There'll be danger in doin' it. The machine is timed to go off to-morrow night—but she may let go from the handlin' at any second. Somebody's foot may hit one of those dynamite sticks—though I'm told they're cased in sawdust balls. Now, I'm goin' into that bunker myself—with a bit of wet sponge tied under my nose so I can breathe. Anybody goin' with me?"

There was a moment's silence, as the idea slowly penetrated the grimy heads of the circle. Then an undersized little runt whom one would have supposed unable to do a day's stoking, asked:

"If we don't do nothin', we gits blowed ter hell to-morrer night—prob'ly before we gits into them boats—hey? An' if we cleans out that bunker an' chucks the fireworks overboard, we gits the laugh on Fritz—tells him he didn't put nothin' on the ball? It's that way, aint it, Cap?"

"Er—quite so. Though ye'll not be overlookin' the somethin' sudden which may happen before the job's done."

"Then I reckon we makes a stab at gittin' the laugh on Fritz! Ye kin stand by an' watch us if ye like, Cap—but ye'll not sile yer hands messin' in that coal yerself. —Come on, ye bloody muckers—let's clean her out an' put one over on the boches!"

Although she knew it was a silly risk to take, the Countess couldn't resist a temptation to watch the emptying of that bunker from the starboard end of the bridge—after Harry Archer, with much remonstrance through the megaphone, had taken the big plane up to patrol the surrounding water. At six bells she came down to dinner in the mess-saloon with the mates, chief engineer and two army captains who were returning on the steamer—several bottles of excellent champagne being served, with Captain Marshall's compliments. The sensation, when they thought of it months afterward, was one of subconscious tension. Probably none at the table, after hearing the details, shared Her Ladyship's confidence that the infernal machine would not explode before the time set, unless from some unavoidable jolt in handling it; and even she caught herself occasionally bracing back in her revolving chair against the rending crash of dynamite which any second might bring. Yet after the meal was over and the cigars had been lighted, she sat down at the upright piano, lashed against the bulkhead, and played Chopin for them.

IN a momentary lull after the vociferous applause which followed, a coal-black head, streaked with rivulets of perspiration, thrust itself out of the yawning port in the steamer's side, and a hoarse bellow came up to them.

"Hi s'y! On deck, there! Would ye arsk the lydy hif she'll 'ammer hout a bit o' 'Tipperary' hon the ol' box?"

With a little shout of delight her capable hands fell upon the keys in the opening chords. Then, whirling about for an instant, she said: "Now then, gentlemen—all together, every last man of you! Up on your feet! Hook that door and all the ports wide open. *Sing it!*"

She started the air herself in a rich contralto which carried distinctly across the moonlit water to where the great sea-eagle watchfully circled, and the crew of the plane howled back the chorus with all the force in their lungs.

After that came other martial songs—English, French, American and Scotch ballads. One of the army captains happened to mention that he was a No'th Ca'lina man, and her Ladyship smashed into "Dixie" with a verve which set every foot to stamping out the time on the deck-planking. Nobody has yet explained, satisfactorily, the psychology of "Dixie"—the subtle charm which has made it loved, made it a never-failing stimulant, from North Cape to Magellan and clean around the Equator. When the Germans hear that song from

American trenches behind the platoons coming like so many wildcats across No Man's Land, they'll know it's only a matter of seconds for them. Better men have died to it before this. One would have had to guess at the various nationalities among the crew of the *Brunswick City*. Yet the opening bars of the song had scarcely reached across the forward deck when half of them came tumbling up the hooded companion, roaring out the words as they reached the to'gallant fo'c'stle.

THE men in Number 6 bunker chafed mightily because they couldn't join the choruses, but theirs was a job in which vibrations of any sort had lethal possibilities. They sweated and toiled in silence—the lives of eighty people and a ship worth three quarters of a million depending upon the velvety touch with which their fingers caressed each filthy lump of coal.

The distinctly audible ticking of clockwork inside a massive lump of coal at length told them they had found what they sought, and they threw it into the water as far from the ship as the muscular arms of two men could heave it—holding their breath, involuntarily, lest the thing explode before it sank deep enough to be harmless. Half an hour later they discovered seven of the sawdust-balls—presumably containing dynamite sticks, though they made no attempt at opening them to investigate. Shortly afterward the eighth was found. By one in the morning they had picked the bunker so clean with their bare hands that a dime would have been plainly visible in the gleam from the bunched incandescents. When the port had been closed, Captain Marshall called all hands on the forward well-deck and after thanking the Black Gang who had so gamely worked to save the ship, ordered a stiff tot of rum served out. Countess Nan paid her respects to them with a brimming glass, from the bridge—then ran down to the piano in the mess saloon. In a moment another well-known chorus came swelling through the open door:

Juist befoor we say gude nicht, we fill our cups an' sing:
It's a wee Deoch an' Doris—

And from the well-deck, came roaring back the comforting assurance:

If ye kin see it's a braw bricht moonlicht nicht,
Ye're all recht—ye ken:
Gin ye see 'tis a braw bricht nicht, the nicht,
Weel—ye're all recht—ye—k-e-n!

DOWN in his own cabin, when the ship had quieted for the night, Captain Marshall thoughtfully lighted a cigar while Her Ladyship sipped at a cup of steaming hot coffee.

"Well, we're safely out of that danger—thanks to you, Countess. But who's to say there are not more explosives in the other bunkers? Eh? Tell me that?"

"Oh, you can't be certain, of course; yet one learns to depend a good bit on the law of probabilities. That boche in Bordeaux ran a sufficient risk to make him and his accomplice gray-headed—getting what he did into that bunker. Had they tried it again when you were coaling on the other side, there was greater chance of their being caught and shot—chance that the work they had already done might go for nothing. The explosives they had planted aboard of you must unquestionably sink your ship—why waste more of them unnecessarily? The German mind doesn't work that way; it is methodical, not wasteful. That you might discover the stuff when once at sea was impossible. You were not German; therefore you couldn't have either sense or forethought. No, Captain—were I in your place, I should watch out most carefully for chance subs on the way over, but as far as other explosives are concerned, I fancy I'd not lose a moment's sleep over them!"

"What action will Your Ladyship take concernin' the widely organized work in this line, ashore? Serious proposition—what?"

"H-m-m—it's a bit easier to say what I'll not do. I've no intention, for example, of filing a report of what I've learned with the Admiralty, and letting it go at that. As a matter of fact, I fancy the danger is less in English ports, just now, than in any outside of England. The cowards have bitten us so many times that we're pretty thor-

oughly awake, by this—particularly in our principal commercial ports. Our water-fronts are very closely patrolled, I assure you. The greatest danger, it seems to me, is in the Atlantic ports of the United States—from the great number of Germans who live in them, and from the German sympathizers. I'll see that the Northcliffe Commission gets the facts before the American Government and keeps jogging the proper departments in the matter. Beyond that, it's up to them. We were stupidly careless in England for the first two years—refused to believe that Germans had no conception of honor or truth, and would knife us in the back at every opportunity. It will probably take even longer for the Americans to hang some of them publicly, as a warning.

"In France, Spain and Italy, I fancy one may accomplish something. After the United States, the danger is greatest in their ports. It seems to me, Captain, that it might have considerable influence if you file a detailed report of this little adventure with the secret service as soon as you reach New York—it will give them something definite to be watching for." She finished her coffee, as five bells was struck, up forward. "Well, I've had an interesting night with you, Captain," she said, rising. "Now I'm going to commandeer a hundred gallons of petrol, if there's a length of hose aboard long enough to reach the plane, and go away from here!"

"We've nothing but the usual three-inch rubber, for deck-sluicing an' fire—rather cumbersome to use across three hundred feet of water. But I can put a couple of barrels aboard the launch, with a hand-pump, and fill your tanks alongside the plane."

SHE left him a few minutes later and went off in the launch with the petrol—which was soon pumped into the reserve tanks. Archer had been tuning up the steel guys and testing wing-joints to see if anything had worked loose, but he seemed to be satisfied that nothing was seriously out of order with the machine.

"Everything in good shape, Harry?"

"As far as I can tell from an examination down here on the water. Of course, you're never quite positive about a machine which is called upon to stand all the sudden twisting strains of flying—that's why I suggested the ironclad rule about a four-hour overhaul aboard the mother-ship, after each regular patrol. In four different cases it has taken us longer than that to put a machine in perfect shape. But we're up against it here—have to do the best we can and take a chance. I fancy there'll be no difficulty in reaching the *Oyama Maru*—she'll not be a hundred miles away at this time."

"Er—you wouldn't attempt to make the French coast?"

"How much of a flight? Five or six hundred miles, is it not?"

"Just about. I went over Captain Marshall's chart pretty carefully."

"Well—it's a risk, Your Ladyship! We'd probably make it—but suppose we didn't! Suppose something happens to you! We all heard just what you did from that pack of cowards on the U-boat—but who in the French or Italian governments would listen to us? I mean listen and *do* something. We're merely unknown men in the British Reserve. You're a celebrity, known all over the world; you have a house of your own in Paris and a villa in Italy; you can have an interview with the French president or any of his cabinet merely by suggesting it. I fancy a delay of twelve hours on the *Oyama Maru* making sure we're all right at the start will be far less serious in the whole proposition than taking any chances with you. It's not precisely a condition of things to be treated as of little consequence."

There was really no chance for argument in the matter. They succeeded in locating the *Oyama Maru* within four hours, and left her shortly after breakfast—flying due east at fifteen thousand feet. Coming down just back of La Rochelle, the Countess reported to the military authorities and sent the plane back to its home base in England, with instructions to report on its regular patrol in the Atlantic as soon as possible. Then she took the next train to Paris.

In these days, women in riding-breeches and puttees are a not unusual

sight in practically all of the larger French cities, but the service uniform of the R. N. R. Aërial Corps drew an occasional glance of appreciative interest as Countess Nan motored through the streets to her own house on the Avenue Neuilly, which was kept in constant readiness for the Earl or herself throughout the year. Stopping only long enough for a bath and a change into a newer uniform of less burdensome thickness, she was driven to the bureau of General Jules Dufèvre—chief executive officer, just then, of the military secret service. Formerly an experienced Algerian campaigner, he had once had the Trevors with him as guests during an eventful ride into the Sahara, and he recognized her at once.

"Ah-h! Madame la Comtesse! I am much honored—me! You will attend—in my little salon-particulier, through this door? —M. le Caporal! You will bring wine and *les petits gâteaux!* No one is to interrupt! —Be at ease with yourself, madame—and tell me what service you require. Me, I shall be charmed!"

AS briefly as possible, Countess Nan gave the General details of what they had overheard from the U-boat, the way they had demolished it and the subsequent nerve-racking hours on the *Brunswick City* while the coal and concealed explosives were being jettisoned. Occasionally he interrupted her to jot down notes and scribble the name of this or that intelligence officer in some particular locality. Then she questioned him concerning the various yards, hulks and steamers where coal was stored in the French ports, the conditions under which ships of the Allies loaded and discharged, the power-boat patrols guarding the water-front in each place—betraying so minute a knowledge concerning such matters that he was astounded.

"It is my custom, General, when I interest myself in a subject, to go into the things which have a side bearing upon it as well. You of course will do everything possible. With your permission, I'm going to do a bit of looking about myself, in several of the Atlantic ports—I'm sure you'll give me letters to the local officers which will insure their coöperation?"

"With pleasure! Provided that Madame will promise to incur no unnecessary risk, personally. We cannot afford to jeopardize people of her sort—it is economic waste, which we do not permit under present conditions."

Her Ladyship laughed. "If I were an insurance solicitor, *mon Général,* I fancy I'd hesitate about underwriting a woman who drops aërial torpedoes upon a German U-boat when she's less than eighty feet above it, and pistol-shots are perforating the body of her plane three inches from her feet! Frankly, I'll promise nothing of the sort! The information we must obtain if ships are to be saved from destruction implies a good bit of risk, one way or another—and I've some curiosity as to whether your intelligence officers will secure anything vitally important before I do."

NOW, there are probably no police in the world as brilliantly successful as those of Paris in dealing with the regular criminal classes, and the military secret service has proved itself, if anything, superior to them. But wartime spies belong to a different class of people altogether from the criminal—being actuated, among civilized nations, by the highest patriotic motives and being moved, psychologically, by widely varying reactions. In submarine warfare,—including the sinking of ships by inside explosives,—the boche plotters come in contact with human strata which do not breed the criminals of peace-times, and they govern their actions accordingly. The Countess of Dyvnaint's immediate interest, therefore,—when she had proceeded to a certain Atlantic port on the coast of France and secured the promise of hearty coöperation from the local intelligence officer,—was not in slums given over to the harpies who prey upon the army, or families cursed with German intermarriages, but in the offices of respectable ship-chandlers where men from the steamers congregated, and in the cheap restaurants frequented by dock-laborers and soldiers who guard the water-front.

Strolling about quite openly in her own uniform, she found it a passport which led to a widely extending acquaintance among steamer-officers of various nationalities; and the fact that she spoke several languages fluently soon made her very much in demand among Americans and English for the little suppers at which they got along but haltingly with their French, Spanish and Italian acquaintances.

IN the course of a fortnight the intelligence officer gave her a hint that a certain Maitre Charles Lecroyeux—the fat proprietor of a restaurant patronized by the steamship crowd and army subalterns—was also the owner of two less pretentious cabarets down near the docks, patronized by stevedores, enlisted men and coal-handlers. Incidentally, while not a secret agent himself, he received Government privileges in exchange for bits of information which he managed occasionally to secure—his loyalty as a Frenchman having been tested until there was no room for doubt. And it was in the higher-class restaurant that Her Ladyship first struck a clue which looked as if it might lead somewhere.

Upon different occasions her attention had been momentarily attracted by a rather good-looking man of middle age who seemed so unmistakably French that he might have been used as a type—a type so common in the streets of every French town that he was really inconspicuous—the sort of man who seemed entirely in his proper place anywhere in the city. Her acquaintances among the shipping men referred to him as a Basque who had lived thirty years in France,—so it was said,—and who made a modest fortune as a ship-chandler, maintaining quite extensive yards on the water-front, where he still did a large business in chains, anchors, capstans, manila rope and coal. He was said to have secured a contract with the new South American steamship line just before the war broke out. When the Government took over the handling of all coal at that port, shipments of it were constantly being stored in his bulkhead-pockets and handled about the harbor by some of his hulks.

SO far, everything about the man appeared to be above suspicion, with the single exception of his half-forgotten Basque nativity, and nobody gave that a second thought. Spain is a neutral country—as yet. A few days later, however, the Countess happened to be strolling past one of Maitre Lecroyeux's more humble cabarets in the dock quarter and noticed M. Soutez at a table inside. Here again there was nothing really out of the way. The man dealt with seafaring men in his business—had risen from humble origin himself and was democratic enough to eat wherever some particular dish appealed to him. But at the next oilcloth-covered table sat a grimy coal-handler, almost too dirty for even a sailor's cabaret. Their backs were to each other; but for the moment each had slightly twisted about in his chair so that he might mutter a few words to the other. Soutez had been apparently reading his paper, which he held partly in front of him, but Her Ladyship distinctly saw the lips of both men moving, though it is doubtful if even their waiter heard them, ten feet away.

In the Café des Étrangers, where the food was served by attractive waitresses, she had noticed Soutez's manner with them. Apparently women were his weak point. Two days after seeing him in this longshore cabaret, she made slight changes in her facial appearance which materially altered its expression, dressed herself in a waitress' neat costume and through a hint to Maitre Lecroyeux, obtained employment in his most pretentious café. While taking the off-hour at the table next to that which Soutez usually occupied, she used her eyes to such good purpose that he deliberately looked for her next time he came in, and waddled over to her table. Before he finished a somewhat prolonged meal, they were upon chatty terms. He saw that she had been educated and had very good manners—which seemed rather independent for convent training, until she told him of the two years she had spent in New York, giving the inference that she was patriotic enough to return and serve her country in any way that presented itself, even waiting in a restau-

rant, as long as it released a man to fight in the trenches.

She offered a combination pretty difficult for a man naturally weak on the woman side to resist. And with an ingenuousness that deceived him completely, she flagged his too rapid advances until the one thing uppermost in his mind was the determination to wear down her scruples if it took six months. As the subject of a neutral government, he had been permitted to retain a touring-car of a model too old to be of much use in the strenuous work behind the trenches—and he finally persuaded her to meet him at his chandlery office, one afternoon, for a ride in the outskirts of the town. Owing to his commercial standing, he had not had much trouble in securing the necessary *"billets."*

THE rendezvous at his yard office was repeated. Sometimes she waited in a private office while he finished his dealings with men outside, and upon one occasion, watching through a grimy office window, she saw him stroll through the yard to a little power-shack near the coal-pockets, with a longshoreman who she was positive must be the coal-handler of the cabaret—though with his clothes brushed and his face washed, he looked far more intelligent than she had thought him at first.

About the time when it became something of a risk to ride with Soutez in his car,—requiring all of her finesse to keep him at arm's length,—Nan became convinced that there must be a rather extensive cellar under the great coal-pile at the further end of the yard. She had purposely come to the place half an hour before he expected her, and the old clerk who occupied the counting-room on the upper floor had escorted her back to the private office as a matter of course. He both admired and pitied her,—knowing his employer rather well,—but his bread and butter depended upon a reasonable amount of worldly discretion. Sitting back from the window, she noticed Soutez at the bulkhead, where the same longshoreman was getting out of a small tug which handled the coal-hulks about the harbor. In a moment or two they came into the lower office, glanced around and then walked across the yard to the little power-shack, which they entered.

It was just large enough to house a gasoline engine and hoisting winch, with additional room for two or three men, standing up, and there was a window in one side of it. She saw the longshoreman's shoulder for a moment or so; then it disappeared, and though she kept her eyes upon the window for half an hour, there was no other sign of life. Two men don't stand absolutely still for thirty-five minutes when they are discussing something of interest. Obviously, they were not in the shack—and they hadn't come out of it. None of the laborers who handled the big pockets, or the chains and anchors, seemed to have any business in that part of the yard. Presently, Soutez's head came into view by degrees, as if he were coming up a flight of narrow steps—she saw him steady himself by placing a hand on the window-sill. Then there was the faint suggestion of a rumbling sound, and the two men came out of the shack.

THAT night a heavy mist drifted in from the sea. At nine o'clock half a dozen indistinct figures drifted silently along the high stone wall of Soutez's yards. Coming to the heavy barred gate, which was closed for the night, they "pyramided" upon each other's shoulders and swarmed over with little difficulty—scattering to search the yards and offices, in which there seemed to be no sign of life. Under the chutes of a big pocket at the bulkhead lay a coal-hulk which had been filled that afternoon and was waiting for a tug to haul her alongside one of the outgoing steamers—a single watchman smoking his pipe in the tiny cabin at one end. Paying no attention to him, the raiding-party drifted over like so many shadows to the little power-shack, where a careful examination with pocket torches revealed the fact that the gears from the shaft of the gasoline engine could be thrown out so as to permit the hoisting-winch to be pushed forward three feet on roller-bearings, after being unbolted. In the space thus uncovered they cautiously pulled up a trapdoor

under which a flight of steps led down to a narrow passage running back under the big coal-pile. At the end of this passage was a heavy door slightly ajar —and beyond it were four men working in what appeared to be a combined machine-shop and laboratory, a number of flasks in concrete niches being presumably filled with high explosives.

The leading officer shook his head slightly as he peered around the edge of the door. If those four boches, knowing they must die anyhow, preferred taking their captors with them, a hammer flung through one of those wicker-covered carboys would insure their sudden elimination, and probably most of the water-front as well. Motioning his men back through the passage, the officer got them up the steps and out of the shack. Then, leaning down through the trapdoor, he blew a whistle three times. In a couple of moments the four boches came sneaking out—looking through the mist for the man who had warned them of danger, as they supposed.

In a sudden rush they were surrounded and disarmed before they could fire a shot—after which an officer was sent to arrest Soutez in his own house. Half an hour later the five were stood along the bulkhead and shot.

As the officer in command was strolling back to the Café des Étrangers for a late supper with the Countess of Dyvnaint, now in her aërial-service uniform, he tried to express a little of his amazement and appreciation.

"Madame, France owes you a debt which cannot be adequately expressed by the Croix de Guerre! In addition to your valuable work at sea, you have beaten us here at our own game! I think one would have suspected almost any man in the city before the good M. Soutez—who is now a dead boche. And why should anyone consider a bomb-fabrique under a pile of coal on the water-front—apparently to behold from every passing steamer! One hopes, madame, that you do not contemplate returning to England for some time. France needs you!"

There will be another thrilling story of the *"Free Lances in Diplomacy"* in our next issue.

The by

"YOU can ride that little split-ear hawss for the first spell," said Cowman Lippincott, Huston's host. "He's Major. The rest of your string will be Bird, Brownie, Medicine Eye, Hump and Monte. That'll fix you, I reckon. Lydia or some of the boys will show you your animals, as you need 'em. But Major'll do to start with. So snake him out and put on that old tree and bridle. I'll pack your stuff with ours."

Forthwith Lippincott strode away, his spurs jingling. He left Huston impressed by the responsibility placed upon him, painfully holding his rope.

Following that chance meeting in Denver with Mr. Lippincott, when he had been so free to confess that he wanted a taste of range life and had promptly been invited to come ahead, Huston had arrived only day before yesterday at the ranch, via saddle from the station, and had found that the spring round-up trek from the Two-Bar-N was apparently waiting mainly on him.

This morning at least fifty horses, driven in last night from the pasture where they had been gathered, were

Spotter

Edwin L. Sabin

jostling and wheeling in the pole corral; the four cowboys, with Lippincott and his daughter Lydia, were stealing and peering along the fence, dragging their rope nooses, biding opportunity for singling out their mounts from among the tossing heads. Huston had been assigned a worn but serviceable saddle ("old tree," as his host expressed it), and a bridle and a discarded rope—and a "split-ear hawss" which he glimpsed only to lose again.

With sudden sharp hisses the uncoiling ropes shot out over the uneasy dodging mass, and settled; and terse exclamations told whether the nooses had settled truly or had been evaded. Evidently the horses knew—yes, indeed, they knew. But one by one the morning's mounts were "snaked out," some reluctant, some immediately docile, all disgusted.

Lon the Texan, his freckled, good-humored but masterful face perspiring, called cheerily:

"Got youah pinto, Miss Lydia. He come handy, so I noosed him. Want him?"

"All right, Lon. Hold him for me just a minute, will you?"

"Hold him foh you till the cows come home, Miss Lydia," assured Lon. Cleverest of the ranch riders, he had been the first to rope out his horse; and having bridled him and saddled him in a jiffy (as a sort of point of honor), he was seeking fresh worlds to conquer. "Walk along, Mistuh Pinto."

THE girl's voice, so near to Huston, startled him. The scene was picturesque, full of lithe action, and for a brief space he had omitted to keep track of her. Nobody was paying any ostensible attention to him, although he felt glances from the corners of shrewd, querying eyes. Nobody was offering to help him, although he observed that man obligingly helped man—and now man helped woman—when occasion was pat. But here in this Western realm a newcomer evidently was expected to work out his own salvation; and provided with bridle, saddle, rope and horse, must contrive to assemble them.

"Can't you catch your horse, Mr. Huston?" She was right beside him—that astonishing creation in trim khaki and crimson kerchief, all booted and spurred and gauntleted—slim, dark, flashing—and feminine.

He flushed, helplessly dangling his rope.

"The brute doesn't stand still long enough."

"Major is mean, that way," she consoled. "Of course, he knows what you're after. It's funny, but they always do know. That old rope of yours is too stiff, isn't it? Lon painted it, and now nobody can throw it." She was recoiling her own rope, her eyes upon the horses. "I'd better try. Where is he? I see!" The split-ear, boring and crowding for covert, was being carried around and around in the scurrying herd. "Wait till he gets his head up."

Conscious that every other mount had been caught and that all eyes were directed his way, curious for the further efforts of a stranger, Huston waited, chagrined. The girl flung up her hand with the coil of rope; the split-ear wheeled sharply and tossed high his head; and at the instant she cast. The noose hissed, opened, hov-

ered over and fell true; the split-ear dodged squarely into it, and she promptly drew tight.

"Hooray!" cheered the Texan. "Fitted a grass coolah to him that time, suah!"

"I'll bring him out, and we'll change ropes on him. Then you can saddle him," she vouchsafed.

"Yes, thank you," admitted Huston. "I ought to be able to do that much."

"Oh, you'll learn, if you don't know already," she encouraged as Major followed the rope while the Texan stood guard at the bars until he had passed through. "But that stiff rope of yours isn't any good at all. You can get a new one when we camp this noon."

Huston was on the point of remarking that what he needed was not a rope but a seine. However, he stifled the confession as superfluous. He would not give the keen-witted cowboys an opening. At any rate, he could ride, thank Heaven.

THEY brought up the rear of the horse-herd, he and she. Occasionally her father would drop back for a remark, kindly but preoccupied, presently to spurt aside again and turn a laggard, while at the other flank the Texan performed like office.

Long of leg and lean of hip was Cowman Lippincott—a hardy old-time plains strain transplanted to the hills range, and a fitting sire for such a daughter. This had been the one great surprise to Huston—the girl! He had imagined that she existed as only a creation of the magazine illustrators and the moving pictures—and here she was, in the flesh—and almost as unexpectedly, in his heart.

Lon the Texan appealed to Huston as not a common type, himself. He was of the younger generation of the cow-country, but of that same brand which those few decades ago rode the indomitable knight-errant trail from the Nueces to the Republican. A rawboned son of the saddle, he had Lippincott's reach of limb, but he had his own red head, generous freckles, square sunny face and steady blue eyes—his own Texas suavity, and stinging sarcasm also. There was good blood in Lon, and quiet efficiency—here. He would make a stanch friend and an equally stanch enemy.

Huston, new and foolish and aquiver, wondered just how far the Texan's constant association with the girl had taken him. Was it brotherly, or— And something warned: "'Ware the Texan!"

The horse-herd, at fast walk and shambling trot, a handful of the animals bearing the camp beds, stretched in a long column; and down the winding yellow road through the sun-bathed sage cloaking slope and level the Two-Bar-N (2N̄) outfit pressed their twenty-five miles to the round-up rendezvous of the White Water district.

"I see the camp!" gayly cried the girl. "There's the wagon, and the cook's fire! Dinner'll be ready. I'm almost starved for some of Pete's good hot-bread."

"Ya-as indeedy," drawled the Texan, now riding at her other side, his bridle-hand high, his heel low, his body yielding easily to the movement of his mount, his big black hat-brim flaring in the fresh breeze off the mesas, his face ruddy. "Um-m! Slumgullion an' speckled pup an' cow-camp peaches. Reckon Mistuh Huston is pinin' right now foh a mess o' speckled pup."

The girl laughed merrily.

"Don't let Lon scare you, Mr. Huston. Speckled pup is only a name for dried-currant pudding; slumgullion is thick gravy; and cow-camp peaches are canned tomatoes. But we do live awfully well, on the round-up."

"Have to," murmured Lon. "Eatin' once a yeah is all that keeps the cowboy fat."

The round-up camp had been located beside a deep-cut sluggish creek in a sagy flat surrounded by the rim-rock mesas. The horses, scenting their assembled comrades, broke into faster pace and went streaming on; their outriders galloped to bunch them in the rope corral so that packs might be removed. With the girl, Huston, the one useless member of the outfit, cantered to the wagon.

He swung off and stiffly stumbled to help her down and to unsaddle for her; but she was quicker than he and

already was tying her animal to the brush.

"You'd better tie yours too," she bade. "He's liable to drag his lines and follow the herd when it's turned out. We can hold the rope to make the corral."

So they relieved the two men who were stretching the rope against which, breast-high, in the brush, the herd was being pent; and with this bond between them they waited for the signal to release. Huston thought he caught a flicker of a smile on the Texan's firm lips.

The packs were removed; two of the men changed saddles, to be prepared for further service; and the herd was freed to join the larger herd grazing beyond. As the rope slacked, Huston was conscious of a sudden shout and chorus of laughter.

"There goes your hawss, Mister Man," sounded the warning.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, dismayed.

Side-stepping to avoid the dragging lines and bunch of sage, his horse, saddled and bridled, was ambling for the pasture.

Huston ran clumsily, calling vainly "Whoa! Whoa!" The horse moved faster. The cheers of the teasing spectators widened the gap. There was thud of hoofs, passing him; with deft swoop the Texan, leaning from the saddle, grabbed the trailing lines, recovered, and led the animal back.

"Heah's youah hawss, suh," he proffered politely, with never a twitch of countenance. And when Huston had trudged the short distance to camp, his rescuer already had unsaddled like lightning and was stripping the girl's horse also.

"Thank you, Lon," she said as with slap on the flank he sent the animal to pasture.

BIDING the arrival of the Open-A (∧) outfit, which had fifty miles to travel from the Flat-tops country, the men in camp idled this afternoon; in shade of wagon or of their big hats they mended minor equipment, joshed one another or squatted at monte, with a saddle-blanket as table and matches as stakes.

The girl was hospitality itself; and Lippincott was pleasant, after his abrupt fashion; but having been introduced to the cook,—a thin, long-nosed, respected personage who shook hands limply,—Huston was still a stranger in a strange land.

For this is the way of the range, and no harm is meant by that certain reserve which draws a circle about the men who know one another and have earned their places at the council-fire.

From a bale of manila rope dumped out of the wagon several of the company began to measure off lengths, amidst comments by interested bystanders, and the girl spoke quickly.

"We'll get you a rope; shall we?" And they walked over.

The Texan was helping with the bale; as the rope ran out, he cut the length at the proper time.

"Mr. Huston wants a rope, Lon," spoke the girl. "That one he has is the old one you painted so as to make it throw heavier, and the paint took all the life out of it. Nobody can use it. It's short, besides."

"All right, Mistuh Huston," vouchsafed the Texan imperturbably. "Grab an end an' walk to that mark yonduh—an' if that's not far enough, keep a-goin' an' say when."

"How long a rope do you throw, Mister?" queried a stocky Three-I (III) puncher, with a wink at his mates.

"What have you boys been drawing?" promptly demanded the girl.

"That mark's thirty-five foot, Miss Lydia," he answered. "A thirty-five-foot rope is all an ordinary hand wants to tote, unless he throws one of them ten-foot nooses like they do in Texas."

The Texan accepted the sly gibe.

"Me, I aim to cover as much cow as I cain, when I throw," he alleged, "an' have plenty slack left to run away with. Grab youah end, Mistuh Huston. If there aint enough rope in this bale, we'll get moh. Foh-ply grass is cheap."

Huston obediently marched out with his end, and at the mark turned.

"Got all you want, suh?"

"Guess I have, haven't I?" appealed Huston good-naturedly.

Whereat the Texan nonchalantly measured off, with outstretched arms, three and a half lengths, and cut.

"We'll call it fohty-five feet, suh," he announced. "Man size! Some people laike lots o' room between themselves an' a cow, when she's on the prod. Take one o' these wil' heifers, an' she's right dangerous."

Appreciating the humor, the crowd guffawed. The Texan snapped his knife shut; and returning, facing the mild hazing, Huston awkwardly flushed. But he wisely made no retort.

"You-all wont be so funny when you've been riding all day," laughed the girl. "Tie the hondo knot for us, will you please, Lon?"

"Proud to do so, Miss Lydia." With strong, sure fingers he skillfully formed the knot through which the noose should slip. "Yes suh," he proffered, having finished. "Frazzle youah other end, an' stretch youah twine from a wagon-wheel to take the kinks out, an' you cain ride round laike a real punchuh. All you'll need is a hawggin'-string."

That veiled sarcasm still persisted, but against it there was no defense, to a man who did not speak the language. Without a word, Huston added his rope to the other new ropes undergoing the stretching process to straighten them.

THIS night the girl slept in the little tent brought for the purpose; the men, except the night-hawk details to herd the horses until the animals had learned afresh to stay together, slept under their canvas bed-sheets. The next morning the gather of the cattle was begun.

Lon the Texan had been elected round-up foreman, a tribute to his popularity and recognized ability. Directly after breakfast, while the horse-herd was being driven into the rope corral, he told the men off into their squads, composed with strict impartiality and without regard to brands, save that a home-range man was assigned, as far as possible, to each: one squad was to ride Cottonwood Creek, one to ride the Black Mesa, one to search Crooked Draw and so forth. Trailing their nooses, the men stumped for the corral to rope out the morning's mounts.

"But you haven't told off Mr. Huston or me, Lon," complained the girl. "What do you expect us to do—haul wood for the cook?"

"Got plenty wood for time bein'," rejoined the cook—an odd figure in cracked oilcloth apron and enormous black hat. "Mought help me wash dishes. Say!"

"I don't reckon I've been set up to be youah boss, Miss Lydia," answered the Texan with a flush, nervously fingering his rope coil. "Leastways, I wouldn't put it that strong. An' as foh Mistuh Huston, heah, he's not ridin' foh wages on the pay-roll, is he?"

"But he wants to ride, and so do I."

"I can't give any orduhs," said the Texan stubbornly. "You're a good cow-hand, Miss Lydia—I'd admiah to have you ride along with me; but this job o' chasin' cows through the brush is a full man-size job, an' the boys wont have time to favor saddle-cohns. Mistuh Huston cain help wrangle the hawsses. But you ask youah dad. What he says goes."

With that, the Texan strode to get his own mount.

The girl colored, vexed.

"Lon slept on the wrong side of the blanket," she apologized. "Are you sore from yesterday? Maybe you'd rather stay around camp to-day. We've got three weeks ahead of us."

"I think I'd rather ride, if there's no objection," answered Huston. "The soreness doesn't amount to anything."

"And you'll soon ride it off. That's the quickest way," she approved. "Goodie! And we'll ride with Dad's squad. They're going to circle the Black Mesa. You'll see some wonderful country. I'll tell him."

Cowman Lippincott, whose morning greetings to his guest had been casual if polite, was cinching his double-rig saddle upon a big gray.

"All right, if you reckon you can stand it," he assented. "You're free-

lances, both of you. Which hawss of your string have you in mind, Mr. Huston?"

"Oh, anyone will do, I suppose."

"It's a big circle. You'd better take Monte. You can't kill him."

"Monte's that high roan; he just tried to bite another horse—see?" pointed out the girl as they stood searching the herd. "He used to be a top cutting-horse, but he's a little stiff now. He can travel all day, though. You can be roping him while I rope Betty."

Huston, his new rope in his hands, again faced his unfamiliar task. Most of the morning's mounts had been "snaked out;" bridles had been clapped on and cinches were being drawn; the men at the two stretched ropes—forming an angle from which the surging animals recoiled—apparently were waiting only on him and the girl.

Huston threw, desperately; but the new rope still kinked; sometimes the noose fell in a twist; it opened too wide and he caught two horses at once, neither of them Monte, which created confusion and invited pungent banter; it fell to the ground and caught a horse by the foot—another example of awkwardness.

The girl was leading her Betty triumphantly out when the Texan's voice spoke with level inquiry at his elbow.

"Just what hawss would you laike to have, Mistuh Huston?"

"Why—Monte," replied Huston breathlessly. "That roan—"

"Yes suh. I know the hawss." Mr. Lippincott also was coming to the rescue, at last; but with a single step aside, for clearance, and with a single half-swing, the Texan cast. He threw a rawhide—no northern "grass" rope for him!—round, hard-braided, three-ply, supple as silk and not much larger than a lead-pencil. It shot out as straight and as true as an arrow, whipped about Monte's unwilling neck, and to the hand-over-hand out came Monte.

"Heah's youah hawss, suh, if you'll lay youah rope on him. Just slip it under mine." And that done, unresponsive to Huston's "Thank you very much," the Texan walked away, his leather wing-chaps scuffing to the businesslike jingle of his rowels.

Huston sensed the armed neutrality; but there was no time for overtures. The squads were leaving. The Texan's squad and the Lippincott squad rode in company for a short distance, to the dividing of their ways—the girl's clear "Good luck, Lon," evoking from the foreman a grave wave of hand as he broke his horse into a lope. With Huston and the girl cantering and loping knee to knee, and closing the rear, the little Black Mesa company of six continued on for their appointed goal.

"Tom, suppose you and Frank take the north side," directed Lippincott. "Everitt and I'll work the west half. Honey," he said to Lydia, "do you reckon you and your partner can handle this west edge? It'll be easy riding. You can just head the cattle down the draw, and we'll all meet up yonder on the flat where the draws come together."

"Can we, Mr. Huston?" challenged the girl. She anticipated his answer. "I should rather think we could, and we don't ask for easy riding either! You don't know—maybe Mr. Huston is a better cowman than you imagine. Nobody can throw a kinky new rope, or a stiff old painted one."

THAT had been glorious—that half-morning's work: weaving at a trot through the pungent sage and greasewood saddle-high upon the sunny mesa; racing at sudden gallop with the girl for cow or cows staring apprehensive amidst the brush and the gnarled cedars; turning them, driving them out, steer and mammy and frisking calf, heading them into the varicolored living rivulet leisurely wending its way to join the main stream at its eddy in the distant flat; and then speeding for new victims.

Sometimes he and the girl hunted together; again they separated, each to charge a bunch. And taken by and large, no "easy riding" it was, when one's horse veered hither-thither, tore up slope and down and unexpectedly leaped little obstructions.

"Do you know, you ride very well,"

proffered the girl with that all-appraising side-glance of the cow-range which measures every detail from heel to hand. "Haven't you ever ridden after cows before? Really?"

"No. I was in the cavalry, though, during the Spanish War. I learned considerable there, of course."

"What cavalry?"

"The Texas."

"I didn't know you were a Texan."

"I can't say that I am, but I lived there awhile."

"Lon would be tickled to hear that. He's a Texan, you know, and he thinks that anybody who's lived in Texas is all right."

"I doubt if Lon would think me all right, no matter where I was from," retorted Huston, with half a laugh, and inference not to be misunderstood.

She blushed at his tone and look.

"Oh, yes, he would. Lon's one of the whitest men in this district, but he was born with a saddle and rope, and somehow he rates other men, at first, 'cording to their skill with these."

"In my opinion," calmly declared Huston, patting his horse's wet neck, "Lon thinks I'm butting in."

"What do you mean?"

"Isn't Lon a little jealous? Not with any cause, maybe, but just naturally resents having an outsider riding around with—*you*."

"How absolutely ridiculous!" scoffed the girl. "That's only his manner; he always sizes a man up before he gets open and friendly. All the boys like to haze a newcomer, especially if he's from town. Lon and I are good chums, on the ranch, but that's all. He may not stay with Dad. His father down in Texas is real well off, and Lon doesn't need to be a cowboy." She changed the subject quickly. "See the cattle? Two bunches! You take the right-hand and I'll take the left."

THE mesa, its sage and cedars, draws and levels, had been well cleaned, so that, finally trailing their own gather down to the flat, from the debouching-point they witnessed the wide fenceless basin already blotched with ambling, bawling animals.

"I see Dad and Everitt!" exclaimed the girl. "There come Tom and Frank, too. They didn't beat us, anyway."

She waved her hand. The two riders, slowly circling the herd and turning in the contrary-headed members, waved briefly back. Farther up, Tom and Frank were bringing down a compact procession.

The bunches all were thrown together. Rebellious steers blared; anxious mammies bawled for their babies; bewildered calves blatted answers; a lone regal bull rumbled belligerent; dust from the restless hoofs hung yellow in the thin air.

"There's no use taking those Box cows on with us," called Mr. Lippincott, who had been keenly surveying the mass of backs and flanks before him. "They belong right here. What big maverick is that?"

"She's a Lazy-D cow, I reckon," replied Frank. "Leastways, she was runnin' with a Lazy-D mammy, back yonder. They must have drifted over the divide from the Lost Park country."

"Yes—some of Robinson's bunch. We'd better brand her and turn her loose. I told Robinson I'd look out for him."

While the others held the herd, Frank, weaving in and out on his knowing horse, cleverly cut out the animals bearing the Box X (⊠) on their hips; and coached by the girl, Huston aided in chasing them into the brush. Their local owner, a small rancher, would attend to them later.

Now the maverick—a long-legged heifer just passing the yearling stage and too old to be still running with her mother—remained. At a little distance from the herd Everitt was on his knees, building a fire. Frank, on his wise little horse, pursued the red heifer through the herd—met her every turning and twisting, forced her nearer and nearer to the edge, at Huston's and the fire's side.

The girl shook out her noose, as if preparatory. Huston valiantly imitated—although why he scarcely knew. With an exasperated toss of her head the heifer broke through—swerved in vain, for Frank was close behind, his noose swinging; she bolted, Frank hard

after—a pretty race, as Cowman Lippincott came thudding, and the girl's horse sprang to the sudden pressure of her heels.

It was a short race. Frank's noose sailed on before him and dropped over the heifer's head. He swerved with the slack; at the check of his rein the rope tautened smartly; and swung with her rear hoofs clear of the sod, the heifer landed flat on her side, with a distinct poignant grunt.

Before she had recovered enough even to kick, Lippincott was there, deftly flipped his noose over her hind feet and drew tight in the one direction while Frank held tight in the other. The heifer bawled raucously, nearly choked.

"Sit on her head, somebody, while I slack off," appealed Frank. And leaving the fire, Everitt obligingly sat on her head, slipped the slackening noose off and sprang away with a laugh, while her pinioned hind legs, stretched to the Lippincott rope, anchored her helpless.

Huston had joined the girl, where she sat her saddle, her rope hanging useless; and as Everitt came trudging hastily with the hot horseshoe running-iron held between crossed sticks, she gaspingly sighed.

"This is the part I don't like," she quavered.

But the law of the range knows no partiality. Oblivious to her low-voiced remonstrance, Everitt knelt upon the prostrate animal's heaving ribs and applied the iron. The hair smoked; the heifer writhed and hoarsely bawled; the flesh sizzled; and relentless he painstakingly inscribed a large Lazy D (ᗡ) on the haunch.

"There's a brand old Robinson can see before he sees the cow," proclaimed Everitt proudly. "What's the earmark? Left square crop, aint it?"

"Left square crop," concurred Lippincott.

With his opened stock-knife Everitt snipped off the end of the left ear, and a tiny jet of blood spurted on his sleeve.

The heifer moaned angrily. Everitt composedly folded his knife-blade.

"Flip off your rope; I'll hold down her head if somebody'll lead my hawss where I can grab it," he called to Lippincott.

That was done.

"Watch out, now!" he warned. "She's liable to be on the prod."

Carefully lengthening his reach, with a spring again he released her head, and legged it, clumsily in his sheepskin chaps, for his mount.

The reclaimed maverick lay an instant, heaving; then on a sudden wakening to her opportunity, she gathered her hoofs under her and lurched to her feet.

Muttering, she glared wildly around, seeking vengeance upon some tangible enemy, and dropping her head with its sharp little horns, she charged the first object that impinged upon her swimming vision. That, it chanced, was the girl—at least, when to her nervous little cry she and Huston broke apart with prick of spur, the blood-mad heifer, seeing red, bolted past him in direct pursuit of *her*.

The enraged heifer could run like a deer, and was no mean antagonist; but the charge would have been short and harmless and soon called off had not fate stepped in. Even while the other riders were cheering, and Huston was turning in his saddle to watch, the girl's horse stumbled, pitched forward and sent her flying.

Huston never knew exactly how he did it. He only intuitively hauled hard on the rein, plunged in his spurs, and went scouring; converging on the spot also, came the other riders. Huston was within reach first. For a moment the heifer, puzzled by the sudden collapse of her quarry, had stopped still, swaying her head and peering. At the sight of the girl staggering up, she lunged again with all intent, but yelling and never pausing for swing or calculation Huston, in onward career, cast his trailing noose.

Never was a throw from the saddle, or from the ground either, more true. To his own surprise, the noose whipped around the animal's neck. The trained cow-horse, seeing as quickly as he did, awaited no command, but veered aside and snapped the slack taut. Caught in mid-stride, the luckless heifer executed

a full somersault, landing upside down at the girl's very heels.

Huston's horse cannily edged away, keeping the rope tight.

"Whoopee!" cheered Cowman Lippincott, pulling short, nigh breathless with the stress, at Huston's saddle-skirt. "Thought you couldn't rope! Hurt, honey?"

"Not a bit," she panted. Frank had caught her horse, trembling but quiescent, and she clambered nimbly on. "Who did that? Mr. Huston? He said he couldn't rope!"

"I can't," laughed Huston. "Nobody's more surprised than I am. Now what'll I do with her?"

"Yuh can slack off," called the man Tom, riding on to the downed animal. "I'll give yuh yore rope. She's had all the fight taken out of her this time." And reaching down from his saddle, he slipped the noose off the heifer's extended neck, sat and watched her weakly rise, and slapping her on the flank, told her to "Git!"

"I reckon that's all," quoth Lippincott, and turned for the herd. So did they all. The girl, cantering to ride beside Huston, thanked him.

"And you said you couldn't rope!" she reproached.

"But I can't," he insisted doggedly. "Accidents will happen, and that was one of them."

"H'm!" she mused; and he recalled that her father had uttered the same incredulous monosyllable in response to the previous denial.

WITH shout and wave of hat and flick of rope-end, the morning's gather from the Black Mesa was started onward down the flat for the general rendezvous.

Hoofs shuffled; cow voices rose complainingly; the strong reek of hot cow-breaths tinged the dusty wake and filled the nostrils of Huston, riding in the line behind. His saddle was blistering beneath him, and his stirrup leathers chafed his shins, but he was satisfied.

Flowing out of a side draw, on the way, the Texan's gather was added. Numbering four hundred animals and ten riders, the combined forces proceeded, until they mingled with the six hundred other animals, and the riders from the other squads, at the meeting-place near the camp.

That evening nothing was said, in Huston's hearing, of the roping episode, save that some sly badinage was directed at the girl; but he was conscious of shrewd sidelong glances as the men in camp lolled apparently negligent, relaxed to the cigarette, and he fancied that certain murmured exchanges had himself as their topic.

Then, after breakfast:

"'Xpect you'll natur'ly catch youah own hawss, this mohnin'," quietly remarked Lon as the herd came in, the men detached their ropes from their saddles and proceeded to the corral.

"I'll make another try," said Huston. "But I'm not betting very strong on myself."

Try he did, covertly watched—which pricked him into being especially clumsy and maladroit, until he mentally cursed in vexation. Most of the men had saddled and were riding out; the men holding the ropes forming the corral were visibly impatient; the girl and the Texan sat their horses, waiting politely, and Cowman Lippincott paused, with foot in stirrup. He withdrew the foot and strode brusquely over.

"Let me have that rope," he demanded. "Which hawss?"

"I don't care," desperately answered Huston. "Brownie or Medicine Eye, I suppose."

Lippincott recoiled the rope, craned for a moment, rudely yanked out Medicine Eye and turned him over to his unhappy rider. Lon, with a grim smile, whirled and galloped away; the cowman followed; and presently trotting after, with the girl, Huston sensed a curious constraint in her evidently forced chatter. Was she, then, like the rest? This was a strange caste which ranked a man according to his ability with rope and horse and cow, in combination.

There was another gather, to-day, by three squads, a sorting-over of the animals on hand—cutting out the local small-rancher brands, clapping the irons on several identified by their

mammies, tussling with an unruly young bull and so forth. Lon broke a particularly bad horse—a process hard on both horse and rider. Two or three of the men loped away for town, ostensibly after supplies. Huston lent his doubtful aid to minor tasks and experimented, on the sly, with his rope.

He progressed in the art of whipping the noose into flight from the ground, but the knack of swinging it and launching it from the air baffled him. Some simple little flick, at precisely the right instant, he missed.

It seemed to have been a particularly nagging sort of day; at supper, in response to the cook's shrill "Come an' get it!" the men ate moodily; having finished, a bunch of them vaulted upon their horses and without invitation to guest or comrades trotted off to town, ten miles, and returned much later, to stumble about in the brush, seeking their beds.

The camp needs must be astir early, for it was to be moved another stage, and the cattle were to be shoved on up, to the next circle country. The gray was still hanging over the flats and cloaking the sage, and the tips of the ranges were just glowing pinkly, when the cook's timely ax rang viciously on his cedar. To his heavy steps as he trudged among the recumbent forms and prodded their tarpaulin coverings, with warning "Hey! Nearly noon. Do yuh want any breakfast?" the camp painfully aroused, yawned, rubbed eyes, drew on boots and stumbled to wash at the creek.

"The Lord may love a cowboy, but nobody else does," commented the Texan. "Some day I'm goin' to shoot a cook."

"Grub pi-ile! Come a-runnin'!"

The girl, emerging from her tent, was trim and fresh, but even her presence failed to mollify a morose camp distinctly suffering from the breaking-in process. The men who had been to town were much the worse for wear; the Texan groaned of sundry bruises consequent upon his tussle with the fractious roan; the cook rattled and banged about as he packed his wagon, and he declared that after this trip he'd cook for "nobody."

Foreseeing a straight ride, by common consent the men selected this occasion to "uncork" the most dubiously dispositioned of the mounts in their strings. They seemed even to experience a certain satisfaction in the anticipation of ruthlessly working off their ill humor on the ill-humored horses—a fair exchange between man and beast.

So the rope-corral, this morning, emphatically had scant use for a greenhorn. "You and Lydia'd better ride with the hawss-herd, to the next camp," Lippincott had tersely directed. "We'll have to shove the cattle up and do a little gathering on the way, and you wont find that much fun." Whereupon Huston, nothing loath, but thus dismissed as a supernumerary, determined to catch his own horse and bother nobody.

"Strictly business," was the word. Without ceremony the men, craning and searching and casting, elbowed him aside, snagged their selected mounts, roughly bridled and saddled them, "cheeked" them and vaulted aboard, there to await hostilities; and in a jiffy the sage was lively with bucking, pitching brutes.

"Can't you catch your horse, Mr. Huston?" called the girl, anxiously. "Which one?"

"H'mph!" panted Huston. "But I'll get him."

"I'll help you."

The Texan quickly intervened.

"No ma'am! I'll take that job, I reckon, if you'll just hold this hawss foh me a second." He swung off and passed the lines to her; then he bore down, his reddened face perspiring, upon Huston.

"Get out o' my way," he bade. "You've whipped every hawss in the bunch, an' it's time foh you to quit."

"I'll be hanged if I will," retorted Huston, stung; and even while the Texan was shaking out his noose, he angrily cast, in another wild essay.

The rope, launched without calculation, met Hump as he whirled in the midst of his fellows, neatly inclosed his neck and tautened. Forth came Hump.

Lon paused a moment, his own rope dangling useless. His face flushed

redder, and he turned on his spurred heel.

"I'll nevuh aim to catch a hawss foh that man again," he proclaimed, scuffing back to the saddle. "He can throw a rope when he has to."

With a derisive cheer and a spatter of remarks more or less pertinent, the men galloped away; the horse-herd was released and started on by the wrangler; the cook wheeled his wagon-team to take his own trail; and Huston hastily bridled and saddled and trotted Hump to the girl.

"And you say you can't rope!" she accused again as together they loped for the wake of the horse-herd.

"Two accidents don't make me an expert, do they?" he answered. "I suppose I'm learning. Anyway, I'm glad I was lucky enough to beat Lon to it. A fellow hates like mischief to have another fellow do his work."

"Do you know, I believe you *can* rope, just the same," she persisted, with one of those odd side-glances at him. "And you certainly can ride."

"I told you I learned that in the Texas cavalry. We didn't have this saddle, but we used about the same seat."

"Yes?" she mused, eying him aslant. "But it's queer how you can ride as well as anybody, and then be so awkward with a rope until there's something doing—don't you think?"

Although he honestly protested, she remained skeptical. It was not to flatter him, he knew; and why she chose to invest him with an unwarranted rôle he really could not understand, unless—unless—she was giving him a chance to pose as an ideal.

While not a fool, he was quite willing to be her ideal, and would gladly have undertaken the task of roping a bobcat; but, he regretfully argued, it was unreasonable to elevate a man, whether good rider or not, to the pinnacle of expert roper, in a day. Whereat she quizzically laughed and spurted ahead in a challenge to a race.

About one o'clock they arrived, with horse-herd and wagon, at the next camp, twenty-five miles by trail; there they helped the cook in his preparations and awaited the hungry round-up gang delayed by that increasing drive of cows.

AFTER breakfast next morning the Texan stepped to Huston's side as the men, ropes in hand, were trudging for the brush-corral into which the horses had been turned.

"Reckon we'll have to put you on wranglin' foh a spell, Mistuh Huston," he said gruffly, without reserve. "We are shoht of men an' got to take the jingler off an' set him to ridin'."

"You mean you want me to herd the horses?" asked Huston.

"Yes suh."

"Glad to help you out, of course; but I like to ride, myself."

"Yes suh," responded Lon. His eyes narrowed and glinted. "But this is a powerful hahd country to ride, specially foh a stranger."

Having delivered this sentence, with cool emphasis, he turned and stalked away, leaving Huston chafed by the rather contemptuous dismissal. Ever since the men had come into camp, on the afternoon before, he had been treated with a marked reserve; and the reason for the aloofness he could not fathom. Even Lippincott and the girl had adopted a measure of the galling attitude which would indicate that somehow he was unwelcome in the company.

"Well, I'm to stay with the horses to-day, I understand," he said to her as he prepared to catch his mount at the brush-corral.

"So I hear." Her voice was level. "Dad thought you wouldn't mind. Lon can use the regular wrangler with the cattle. Part of the men have to drive the bunch farther up, and this makes us short-handed for the circles."

"You'll ride, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; they need *me*."

He had no offer of help in catching his horse—and indeed he did not require help. Bird, his choice of his string, was crowded close to him, and he easily tossed the noose over her head.

"Hombre" (Hombre was the Mexican wrangler) "will show you where to take the hawsses," said Lippincott, approaching.

"This is to be my steady job, is it?" queried Huston.

"I dunno," answered Lippincott, evasive but steady-voiced. "For a day or so, anyhow. They wont require much herding after a bit. Just now some of 'em might be likely to head for the home range. You can help us out with the hawsses better than you can with the cows, in this country."

"All right," replied Huston; and drawing his cinch tight, he climbed aboard.

THE outfit trotted away, all together, the girl riding beside the Texan. Hombre, the bearded Mexican, stationed the horse-herd; then with a grin and a series of broken sentences, he delivered hasty pointers upon the characteristics of certain animals—after which he happily tore off at a mad gallop, to be a vaquero with the other vaqueros. He was like a schoolboy released.

The horse-herd pasture had been located here around an elbow in the rock-and-cedar-and-piñon interspersed valley inclosed by the thinly timbered hills. The camp, and the cook's fire, were out of sight a mile distant at the stagnant water-hole of Coyote Spring—seepage from the near-by rim-rock.

Relegated entirely to his own devices and the devices of the horses Huston found his job a lonely one and a lazy one. The herd busily cropped the dry, bunchy grass, preferring it to the vivid green around the moist sink that betrayed an underflow. Occasionally an animal or two strayed toward draw or hillside, seeking imagined dainties; but riding the edge of the herd, Huston promptly turned them back in.

Between-times, tiring of the saddle, he might dismount and sit on a rock or in the shade, idly toss pebbles, examine the immense landscape, cast a casual eye over the herd, and cogitate, while his own horse munched, cautiously twitched at the dragged lines, and the striped chipmunks chattered from the rocks, and the blue mountain jays screamed in the trees.

Assuredly "hawss-jingler" duty with a docile herd was the post of a boy or an incompetent, and he could not, for the life of him, understand why, when he was under suspicion of being a rider and a roper, he should have been put in Coventry, so to speak. He had tried hard to be decent and friendly and do his part—had asked no special favors in camp or ahorse; and he had committed no breaks that he could recall. Certainly he had not acted "smart"—that taboo of the cow-camp. But now even the girl, and Lippincott his host, were viewing him askance.

Lon, perhaps, was jealous, but the girl had brought that about, not he himself; and besides, she was only friendly, to them both. And Lon did not seem to be of the kind to work underhanded. There was something grim and straightforward, something very likable, in the Texan. He rather was a man who'd take his medicine and play fair. But it did look as though he were taking an advantage—by his authority assigning a possible rival to camp and the horse-herd, so that he might ride with the girl. And, hotly reflected Huston, the father connived at it; so did Lydia.

All right; let it go.

The hours passed slowly, tugging at reluctant noon. A vast quiet had settled upon the limitless reaches of slope and level. The horses having grazed their fill, stood almost motionless, save for switchings of tails; heads drooped; a number of the animals were down. The jays had ceased screeching. A buzzard sailed and sailed, leisurely cruising the high blue, like an air-scout quartering for submarines.

Huston began to wonder about dinner. Nothing had been said as to his dinner or as to his bringing the horses in at noon; but he assumed that the men would want a change of mount in the middle of the day, as usual. That gave the wrangler a chance to eat. By custom somebody was sent out to meet the herd and help the wrangler corral it, or if the herd was not needed, to spell the wrangler and let him eat. Waiting irresolute, Huston waxed hotter. Suddenly he sighted a rider issuing from the curve of a draw beyond him, and with plunging descent over rocks and through sage, line a

course down the hillside, for him. It was the girl Lydia.

HER entrance was spectacular, although just like her. When she had the mood, she was Indian, in the saddle. A little glow filled his heart. She was coming with a message or other good intent. He waved at her, and awaited her arrival with a smile.

But when she pulled short, it was with no answering smile. Her horse was blowing; her eyes were troubled.

"You'd better get out right away," she panted. "I've come to tell you."

"Get out? Where? Also why?"

"You can make Dragoon, on the railroad. It's only thirty-five miles. There's a trail to it, through that gap yonder. You can leave the horse with the station agent, and we'll send for it."

"But just why should I get out?" he demanded, puzzled by her earnestness. "If I've done anything, I want to know."

"The boys see that you're a spotter, and they wont have that kind of work. They've caught a wild horse, and they're going to haze you when you come in. I hate a spotter too," she concluded vehemently, "but I'd rather you'd go without being hurt, and so would Dad. You're our guest."

"What do you mean by spotter?"

"You!" she retorted. "We don't know whether you're a Government man or employed by the State Livestock Association; but you're in here to get evidence if you can."

"Great Scott, what evidence?"

"On the branding of mavericks and the use of saddle-irons and all that. There's not a cattle-rustler or a horse-thief in this district, if we can help it; but we have our own rules and we can 'tend to our own affairs. We don't need to be spied on."

"I'm not spying, and I certainly am no spotter," he declared, indignant. "Never even heard the word before, until you spoke it. Why in Hades should they think me a spotter?"

"You're something wrong. You pretended to Dad you were a tenderfoot, wanting to see range life—and you can ride and rope as well as anybody."

"I may ride a little, but I don't rope and I can't!"

"You *do,* though, when you have to! You've given yourself away twice. You haven't been quite smart enough, Mr. Huston. They're all on to you, and they're going to haze you plenty if you don't light out *pronto.*" She had dropped into tart vernacular. "So please go while you have time," she added more gently.

"How do you know they intend to haze me?"

"I overheard. Lon and Frank have roped old Thunder. He's a bad horse who's been running in the hills until he's the same as wild. Nobody ever could ride him, anyway. You'll be put on him—but I thought you ought to have a chance to get away, first, without trouble."

"Mighty kind of you. Kind of Lon, too," remarked Huston, sarcastically. "I think Lon has an eye on his private range as well as on this other."

"You've no right to talk that way," she flamed. "Lon's not that kind. He's all man—and a fine, big man. He wouldn't stoop to petty work. He's the most popular man in the district. Besides, he—" She checked herself. "But you're just wasting time," she continued. "I wish you'd go."

"You want me to go, do you?"

She colored.

"I don't want you to be hurt. I don't want anybody to be hurt."

"Good-by." He wheeled the horse he was sitting.

"You *are* going?"

"Yes, to camp. I'll go out as plain John Huston, but I'll not be run out as a spotter."

He fancied she called after him, dismayed; but he did not slacken his angry gallop.

SEVERAL of the men were in camp, returned from their morning's shove-up of the cattle and now lounging relaxed, waiting for dinner. They eyed him as if curious at his headlong pace.

"Well, Mister Jingler?" accosted one, a trace of derision in his tone and the curve of his dust-cracked lips.

"Well, yourself!" rapped Huston as

he flung off and let the lines drop. His voice carried a challenge, but did not disturb their poise. He seated himself.

"Don't we get any more hawsses to-day, Mister?"

"Yes sir, if you need them. The herd's there. I wasn't told to bring it in. I'll see that it's here if it's wanted."

"Yes sir; so will we, I reckon," mused an Open-A man, leisurely rolling another cigarette. "But you don't have to hurry. Think you'll stay for dinner?" he asked.

"I might eat a snack, if there's time."

The group laughed in easy, insolent fashion.

"Yes, he'd better stay, now that he's here," they agreed.

With the tail of his eye Huston, boiling, saw riders approaching down the narrowed upper end of the valley. He recognized Lippincott, Lon the Texan and Everitt; sitting askew, his rope taut over his right thigh, the Texan was leading a bridleless, saddleless horse; Lippincott and Everitt were driving it behind—closing in on its every curvet and gyration and urging it along. There were other riders, further up.

The girl, then, had spoken the truth. Huston caught a slight tensing, a keening of glance in his direction, in the group near the cook's fire, where they lolled expectant. A sensation of helplessness chilled him, but he would not betray it. He was the only one against many; they might haze him, but they couldn't break him.

The led horse was a small, burmatted, round-barreled black—sweat-stained, froth-flecked, nervous and rebellious, half choking himself on the rope as he swerved and hung back like a hooked fish. Lon stolidly gave him not an inch; Everitt whooped gleefully, reaching for him with a rope-end. Lippincott spurred ahead.

"OH! You're here, are you?" he commented, noting Huston and Huston's mount. Where's the cavvy?"

"Out yonder. Do you want it?"

"I don't know. Who's with it? Anybody?"

"Miss Lydia was there when I left," informed Huston calmly, above his thumping heart. "Whether she's there still, I can't say. I didn't ask her to relieve me."

"What'd you come in for?"

"I thought it was about time to eat. Nothing was said about bringing the herd, but I'll get it."

The cowman slipped from his horse, tossed aside the lines and methodically drew off his gauntlets—slapped them.

"No, you needn't," he rejoined crisply. "We've more important business, and we might as well attend to it now. Just what was your object in coming into this country, Mr. Huston? What do you call yourself?"

Huston stood up to face the music.

"I came because I wanted to learn something of range life. That's all. I told you so in Denver, when you were good enough to invite me. And I've tried to act white, too," he added sharply. "What's the trouble?"

"Trouble for you's just beginnin'," remarked somebody slyly.

"Yes sir, so you told me," continued Lippincott; "and I took you at your word. I didn't suspect you were that kind of a snake—a spotter."

"Whoever says I'm a spotter is a liar," returned Huston furiously. "I'm not a spotter or anything like a spotter. I don't know enough about cattle, or the laws, to be a spotter. I'm precisely what I claimed to be—no more, no less."

The groups, sitting, standing and ahorse, were listening and gazing, intent. The cook had neglected his Dutch ovens and his fire. At the word "liar," Lippincott's right hand had fallen to his hip, to grope there significantly—a motion purely mechanical.

"Yes sir," he answered steadily, "I hear yuh. I reckon you know more about cattle and laws than is right healthy for yuh. As for learning—where'd you learn to throw a rope?"

"I never learned."

"Born that way, eh?" Lippincott laughed shortly. "Born in the saddle, aholt of a steer!'

"Whatever riding I know, I got mainly in the Texas cavalry," asserted Huston.

"Heap o' men in that Texas cavalry," drawled Lon. "I've met so many they'd make the State bulge at the aidges."

"It's a State that's apt to bulge a little, on occasion," Huston retorted.

"Just so," drawled the foreman. "Some folks natur'ly turn its stomach."

"Possibly that's why some folks raised there don't stay," Huston venomously answered, without looking. "They come North. No, I'm no spotter, Mr. Lippincott. If I was a spotter or anything like it, I wouldn't be standing here."

"How so?"

"Because—" But he didn't say it. He could not betray her. "Because you've all shown me I was suspected of something, though I didn't know what. That would have been warning."

"So yuh stayed, hoping, as a bluff. All right. You can't do this outfit any harm; we have as good laws as ever were made, and we live up to 'em. When and where we put a running-iron on a maverick is our business and nobody else's. Who hired you to come in here? Gawd knows I never saw you before, till you struck me, down in Denver. I reckon I seemed easy to yuh—but you showed yourself up when you roped that heifer. Fact is, we've all had our eyes on yuh, ever since you put foot in stirrup. You played the greenhorn-game too hard, for a man with a marked deck."

"I tell you you're all dead wrong, then," protested Huston, vehement, for the ground was very unsteady under his feet. "I'm ready to leave the camp, if I'm not wanted, but I'll not leave as a spotter. I'm not built that way. I'll stick till I prove to you men—"

THE slight swish of a rope, and the instant clapping of the noose over his shoulders and around his arms, pinioning them tight, cut his appeal short. Dragged backward, down he plumped—there, unresisting, to be scientifically trussed, arms and ankles, as securely as any hog-tied calf.

"Speakin' of stickin', we'll see how well you *can* stick, Mister Spotter," derided the Open-A man, removing his noose.

"You're a pack of cowards!" gasped Huston. He writhed. "I'll fight any one of you. And anybody who calls me a spotter is a liar."

"Guess I'll have to swaller that," grinned the Open-A man. He gulped. "She's down; but," he added, sobering, "she's liable to come up."

"Better use that same old tree he's been riding," directed Lippincott. "Then if anything happens to it, there'll be small loss. He'd like a hackamore, too, to hold on by, I reckon."

The black led-horse had been standing braced, staring and defiant, his eyes rolling red, his flanks trembling.

"Throw him?" queried Everitt, alertly dismounting with his rope.

"No, unless he throws himself. Snare his feet till we see what he'll do. Get a blind ready, somebody."

"Here's a piece of gunny-sack," called the cook, anxious to help.

Huston sat without further struggle or word, firmly controlling himself under the fire of questioning, tremor-seeking glances. The expedition with which the horse was handled interested him but did not reassure him. They made short work of that horse!

Twitching his noose along the ground Everitt advanced, cast with short little tosses as the horse reared and snorted, and when presently the animal stepped with both forefeet into the noose, jerked sharply upward—had him snared. Whereupon Thunder did the rest—plunging in a circle until, hobbled as he was, he threw himself.

The Open-A man knelt on his head. With a couple or so neat twists the rope-bridle or hackamore was looped around his nose and carried behind his ears; the gunny-sacking blind was laid over his eyes and tucked under the hackamore. The workers sprang clear. In response to a slap and a kick, Thunder staggered to his feet, where, free of hobble but blinded, he stood trembling.

He cringed as the saddle was tossed upon his back. His attitude boded no good. The front cinch was drawn until it creased his belly.

"Youah tuhn, Mistuh Two-spot," quoth the Texan. "Goin' to ride with spuhs?"

"Yes, leave him his spurs, boys," ad-

vised Lippincott. "He can hook 'em into the cinches. Pull leather, too! Open ground-rules! Hoist him aboard."

Huston stolidly submitted, although his wrath was at white heat. They seized him, untied his ankles, hauled him upright, marched him across, fairly lifted him into the saddle, inserted his feet to the insteps into the stirrups and held them there while his hands were being loosed. The animal cringed again under him, and he felt a stiffening and arming of every sinew in the affrighted, protesting body.

"You're a set of cowards!" he burst out. "Let go of me. I don't have to be held on. You're more afraid of this horse than I am!"

"Reckon we *know* more about this hawss than you do."

"Untie his hands."

"Slip that noose off, somebody."

"All ready? Watch out!"

THE men spread. Reaching out, the Open-A man snatched away the blind.

"Whoopee!" A hat slapped the black smartly on the haunch. "Buck, you son of a wolf! Get away! Get away! Whoo-oop!"

Barely an instant, dazzled, the black horse had hesitated, to recover his sight. Then at sting of hat and shout, he broke into quick action. Huston had no time to slide off; he had no time to *fall* off; his opportunities changed too rapidly. At one moment he was in the saddle; at the next he was in the air above—to land atilt, only to be rocked, hoisted and rearranged, while the convulsive animal beneath him pitched and squealed.

He bit his tongue. Every bone was jarred. His neck snapped. He lost a stirrup, found it by accident, lost the other—was jolted forward, was jolted back, was jolted to right and to left—clung determinedly with hands, with arms, with legs, with spurs, how and when and where he might—clung like a shaken spider. The faces and figures and landscape mingled in a flashing blur, and voices beat upon his ears. Evidently Thunder was performing according to rote; the show was up to expectations.

"Go it, boy!"

"He's pullin' leather!"

"Watch the son of a wolf pitch!"

"Scratch him, Mistuh Two-spottuh!"

"Whoopee!"

"Tickle his neck, and he'll swap ends for yuh!"

"When you get enough, tumble off. That hawss'll never quit."

Hats were waving and flapping and encouraging — n o t encouraging t h e rider, but the horse. In every voice there was only avid glee. Huston felt sick. Blood stained his lips and trickled from his nose—for Thunder varied the pitching with stiff-legged bucks. "When you get enough," the hail had derided. Huston already had enough and to spare, but he was not the kind to say so. Yes, they might kill him, but they could not break him. Pretty soon he would be thrown off—he had hung askew several times; and then he would tell them so, if with his last breath.

On a sudden the horse bolted—with a squeal and a spring leaped away, lengthened into full stride, brushed every figure aside and with jump after jump headed out down the valley. Weak and sick, Huston again twisted his spurs in the broad hair cinch, clung to horn and hackamore rope, fought to straighten himself—knew that he made an inglorious John Gilpin; but now he *dared* not fall off!

The air whistled in his ears, and lashing his eyes, drew the water from them so that he saw dimly. But with astonishing quickness he was almost opposite the horse-herd and could sense his direction. His vision cleared enough to enable him to see heads lifted inquiringly; he bethought himself of the girl—had she seen, witnessed him in his travail? He hoped not—and hardened bitterly as he reflected that no doubt the spectacle of him would have been, and perhaps was, as amusing to her as to the others.

SOMEBODY had emerged from the herd into the open and was racing to intercept him. The girl? Yes!

With all the reckless abandon of the range-rider she came on, at an angle, aiming for the frenzied black, who was tiring now. He spurted, slackened,

spurted; but the girl's mount was enjoying the chase, and the angle steadily narrowed. Her rope was down; she waved her arm encouragingly (God bless her for that!) and Huston was inspired to tug at the hackamore to keep the black's nose down and his head away from the timbered slopes of that draw to the right.

Thud-thud—strain and strain; but the angle lessened. The black swerved, and Huston tugged in vain. He was very tired himself. He twisted to look, rather hopelessly, and the girl was nearer. If he had detected the least trace of pity or amusement, he would have dug his spurs in; but his glimpse of her features showed them set with resolve.

"Down!" she motioned—maybe she called the word, for her lips opened. "Down! Down!" Her noose was swinging, and the timber was close before. So he doubled forward, with both arms about the lunging black's froth-daubed and rigid neck, his face buried in the hot, strong mane; and he waited.

Something whipped shrewdly across his bowed back; the horse under him started violently, leaped mightily once, and plowing the sod with his forehoofs, whirled and stopped. The noose was on his neck, and he knew the bite of it. The fight was out of him, outlaw though he was.

Huston seized the moment to tumble off. He tried to dismount, but his legs gave way beneath him; the ground reeled, and he collapsed, sick and weak from sole to crown.

The girl was crouching beside him. He dully heard her appeal.

"Mr. Huston! Are you hurt? Oh, it was a shame! Why didn't you let him throw you right away? You oughtn't to have stayed with him—you might have been killed!" He felt her arm supporting him as he swayed, striving to sit up. He felt her softly wiping the blood and dank sweat from his face. Her voice and touch were all compassion. "He must have pitched terribly. And he was headed straight for the timber! You are," she said gravely, "one of the pluckiest men I ever knew. I don't believe you're a spotter."

THE concluding sentence pricked him. A cheer, apparently distant, struck through his humming ears; he dimly saw other figures, ahorse, bearing down on his trail; he saw the black standing, spent and adroop, with the rope from his neck stretched taut to the saddle-horn of the girl's horse, braced and vigilant. He drew slightly away from her and sat more erect.

"Will you say that again, in earnest?" he stammered.

"I don't believe you're a spotter," she repeated. Her face softly colored.

"That's enough, then," he responded. Warmth and determination again flowed in his veins. "I'm not—never was. I'm only a fool, trying to do his best. But I'll not be run out, not as long as you—"

The rush was upon them. The voice of Lippincott rang sharply.

"That man hurt?"

Huston struggled to stand and face them.

"No!" he rasped thickly. "Curse you all, you *can't* hurt me! Bring on another horse. I'm ready."

To his shame he collapsed again; but the girl had sprung up and was exclaiming passionately.

"You're cowards!" she accused. "And he's all man. He's no spotter. I'm sure he isn't. He had a chance to get out—he knew what you were going to do, for I told him. But he wouldn't. He—"

"What's that?" Her father's voice rang again. "When did you tell him?"

"Here at the horse-herd, before you caught him at camp. I told him to ride to the railroad and leave his horse there, or he'd be hazed on Thunder. He had a good chance—he needn't have been caught at all."

"What did you do that for?"

"Because I didn't want him hurt." Her tone was defiance. "And instead of taking his chance, he rode straight for camp. You thought he was there by accident, but he wasn't."

"The man who says I'm a spotter is a liar," again challenged Huston, meeting the fixed gazes with his bloodshot eyes. "You thought to break me, but you haven't. I'm—right—here."

A momentary abashed silence had

settled upon the group. The Open-A man murmured confession.

"Well, if he says we're liars, I reckon we are."

As if his words carried conviction, the men vaulted down. The Texan was first. His freckled face bent close above Huston; his hands, exploring for a grasp under Huston's arms, were as gentle as a woman's.

"We-all made a plumb mistake, Mistuh Huston. We don't aim to haze a man of youah brand. Cain you stand?"

Lippincott assisted.

"*Mistake* is a poor word." His voice was hard with feeling. "Curse us for a pack of fools, but we acted according to our judgment. Any satisfaction you want out of this outfit you can have, sir. We didn't look for you to stick on that hawss, though. I take my hat off to you."

"I can stand," uttered Huston. "You can let go of me. What do you want me to do now?"

"We want you to come back to camp —eh, boys?"

"We shore do."

"Can you sit a hawss, if we help you along?"

"I'll sit a horse, but I wont be helped."

"By Henry, I do love a man!" ejaculated the Texan, honestly. "Sit my hawss, Mistuh Huston, an' I'll be proud to walk by youah side."

"I think I'll ride the black," faltered Huston.

"Whoopee!" The group cheered.

"Oh!" gasped the girl. "He mustn't! Don't let him, boys!"

"You bet he'll ride the black," pronounced Lippincott. "And he'll keep him. He's the only man that ever did ride him to a finish, and if that hawss isn't gentled now, I never saw a hawss that was. He's done fighting for to-day, anyhow. He may have another round or two left in him, but I reckon he knows his master. All he needs is steady work, and he'll be the best cow-hawss on the range. Slip that hackamore through his jaw, but let the rope stay on him. All right, Mr. Huston; there's your hawss. He's nobody else's. We'll vent him for yuh and put your brand on him."

"Yes suh. He belonged to the Open-A, but you've done won him," announced the Open-A man.

LON solicitously helped Huston aboard. Thunder stood quiescent, with the group alertly watching. As Huston settled himself, still racked in body but more content in mind, the Texan, needlessly adjusting the stirrups, spoke crooningly.

"Yes suh. You won a hawss—an' I reckon that aint all. Dunno, me; but if a suhtin little girl down in Texas had an ahm round my naik laike I saw somebody's ahm a few minutes ago, I' feel a-shoutin'."

"You mean—another one, Lon?"

The Texan straightened and surveyed him steadily.

"Your trail's in the Nohth; mine's in the South," he said. "She's nevuh been this side the Red River." And he stalked away, humming "Will You Come to the Bower?"

The girl Lydia had passed her shortened rope to her father. He rode slightly ahead, leading the black, which ambled soberly. She fell in beside Huston; some of the men raced before, whooping for "grub pile."

"Lon has a girl down South, he tells me," said Huston suddenly.

She flushed, answering.

"Yes. He counts on marrying her next winter."

"Oh!" blurted Huston. "Why in the dickens—"

"Do you think you'll stay through the round-up?" she queried, mischievous and glowing.

"Maybe."

"You're entitled to your revenge."

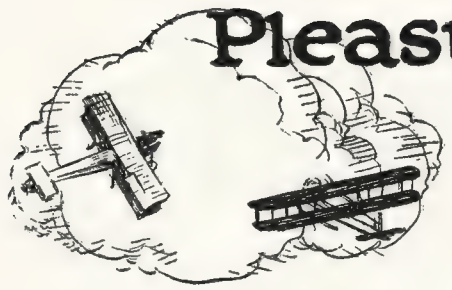
"Yes, I think I am—either that or a reward," he mused significantly. "After I've earned my way, I'm going to ask your father if he'll help me along with a 'J-H' brand."

"You mean—vent over to you some of the Two-Bar-N stock?"

"Not necessarily. But I'd hope to record my 'J-H' rights to a certain 'L-L' thoroughbred that he has."

"'L-L'? What—oh! I—don't—know," she faltered.

But she did know, or she would not have looked that way.



Pleasure Island

A Continued Story

by Frank R. Adams

(What Has Already Happened:)

A NERVOUS breakdown drove me into a sanitarium; and the sanitarium drove me to a nervous break-away one foggy night.

As I made my way along the beach,—the sanitarium was on the seashore,—I stumbled upon a man lying motionless with a chloroform-saturated towel tied across his face. I removed the towel, and finding that he was by no means dead, I—I stole his clothes; for I had escaped clad only in bath-robe and pajamas. Next I commandeered a deserted motorboat and went away from there.

But presently I heard voices on another boat near by. Said one voice:

"Do you, Victor, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

A man's voice answered: "I do."

"Do you, Rosalind, take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

"No! No! No!"

There followed the sound of a dispute, of a scuffle. And a moment afterward a woman clambered over the stern of the boat I was in.

I started the boat full speed ahead and so escaped from the other. And presently the girl explained.

She had come to the mainland with Sommers, a servant at Pleasure Island, where she lived with her stepfather. She had met her uncle, Spring-Gilbert, and a Mr. King. Her uncle had invited her to visit his yacht; she had done so—and they had detained her and tried to force her to marry King. Her refusal and escape had followed. The chloroformed man was the servant Sommers.

Eventually we came to an island with a lighthouse on it. And there we found Mr. Joy—Rosalind's stepfather—and Mrs. Strang, his housekeeper. The latter put Rosalind to bed, and Mr. Joy and I had a talk.

Rosalind's mother had been wealthy, and she had left a will designed to prevent Joy's marrying again, by giving him the use of her fortune only so long as he remained a widower. If Rosalind married or died before the age of twenty-five, the money was to go to Mrs. Joy's brother, Spring-Gilbert. It was for this reason, of course, that Spring-Gilbert had tried to kidnap Rosalind and force her into a marriage before she was twenty-five.

THAT night I was roused by a shot, and meeting Rosalind, went with her to rouse Mr. Joy. We found him —lying dead under a skylight in his laboratory where he pursued his hobby —chemistry. Even as I stared in horror, flames appeared, and in a moment the whole place was ablaze. At the same time I heard an anguished cry—"Harry, don't"—and caught sight of Mrs. Strang. I had trouble getting her out, for she was frantic with fear.

Next day Spring-Gilbert and Victor King landed on Pleasure Island from their yacht. Seeking to escape them, Rosalind and I took refuge in the lighthouse. They smoked us out, however —that is, they allowed Rosalind to come out when the smoke became intolerable; and then they compelled her to complete the marriage ceremony with King before I was released.

As if that were not enough, Mrs. Strang now appeared with the sheriff

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from the mainland, and I was arrested, charged with Mr. Joy's murder! I was locked up in a cottage on the island; Dr. Canfield, head of the sanitarium, was brought to identify me. And then Mrs. Strang, who had denounced me, most paradoxically helped me to escape, through an underground passage.

With a heavy bar of metal picked up in this underground vault, I knocked down my guard. Then with Dr. Canfield I set out in a launch to overtake Spring-Gilbert's yacht, which had departed, with King and Rosalind aboard. We caught the yacht and clambered aboard—just in time for me to apply my bar of metal to the head of Victor King, who was drunkenly smashing in the locked door of Rosalind's stateroom.

King made no protest when I kissed his wife. He didn't even groan or stir, but Spring-Gilbert arrived on the scene and called the crew. The sudden stopping of the boat's propeller saved me. Then the yacht heeled way over, and a rush of water came pouring through the corridor. Spring-Gilbert disappeared. Rosalind and I made our way up to where we had a clear view of the deck above. The lifeboats and crew were gone. I stumbled over something—the body of Spring-Gilbert, shot through the top of the head. While I was trying to remove the body, it slipped away and plunged into the water. Dr. Canfield reported that King would recover. Then I took a nap—and woke up at Pleasure Island with the sheriff ready to take me to jail for murder. At my trial Mrs. Strang testified against me, and the jury convicted me. The judge uttered a solemn speech which ended "hanged by the neck until dead."

(My Story Follows in Detail:)

CHAPTER XXV

"THE judge is known as a 'hanging judge,' and the Governor of this State has never granted a single pardon during his two terms of office," Mrs. Strang had said when she had first shown me the way to escape from Pleasure Island.

She had proven herself right on the first count, and we were to discover with much travail that her information was equally accurate on the other. Appeal after appeal was made to Governor Langham. Even Rosalind—dear heart—went to him, but he turned her away.

I had been removed to the State prison after my trial. It was a tremendous institution, more like a coast-defense fortress than anything else. To complete the resemblance there were even machine-guns mounted on the concrete walls—pointed in, however, not out. They commanded a great courtyard over four hundred feet in length, where the majority of the prisoners exercised. I and another man awaiting execution of sentence were not allowed to mingle with the others, but I saw them sometimes from my barred window.

All that sounds strange and nightmarish, doesn't it? That was the way it seemed to me at the time—the way it seems to me even yet. There was nothing real about it; my brain had a lot of numb cells in it that nothing appeared to touch. It was like having something lanced while under the influence of a local anesthetic. There should be pain; your eyes tell you so, but there isn't—nothing but numbness.

My life at the prison was like that. The fact that every day which passed was presumably a tremendous part of what was left to me of existence made no appreciable effect upon my mind. I had heard somewhere that time for condemned men always passes like that up to a certain point. Then comes a terrifying awakening. With detached curiosity I waited for that day. I wondered how I would act.

My nature had changed at that. My sense of humor had been stunned as if by a blow on the head; it failed to react to prison conditions. Neither was I irritable any more. Confined under only slightly more favorable circumstances at the sanitarium, I had been an exceedingly cantankerous patient. Here I did not care. Life for me had just naturally ceased to contain an emotion of any sort.

I SUPPOSE the very complexity of the calamity which had befallen me served to deaden its effect. Maybe it is fortunate that troubles never come singly; one acts as an antidote for another. The loss of Rosalind, a blighting enough sorrow, was overshadowed by the sentence of death under which I lived. And on the other hand the termination of existence was not such a terrible thing to contemplate if the alternative was life without Rosalind.

Two days before the date set for my execution Dr. Canfield came to me full of hope. He was always that way, so I failed to enthuse very much.

"Mrs. Strang is going to the Governor herself and ask that your sentence be commuted to life imprisonment," he announced. "She offered to do it of her own accord. We hadn't thought to ask it of her."

"Well?"

"Her request ought to have a great deal of weight with the Governor. It was really her testimony which convicted you."

"Is she going to tell him that she lied?" I asked with passive bitterness.

"I don't know what she intends to tell him, but I do know that since your trial, the woman has suffered tremendously. She was rather a good-looking woman once. Now she is not; her eyes are sunken; she is thin, and her face is the face of a haunted human being. I'm free to confess I can't account for her reaction to the situation, unless it was she who killed Joy herself."

"I don't believe that. If she had killed him, I believe she is the kind of person who would stand up and take her medicine. Unless I am mistaken, she would not try to shift her guilt off onto an innocent person."

"BUT she did do just that, and now she seems to regret it. Why?"

"I don't know."

"She must have fallen in love with you."

"Nonsense."

"Remember how she fainted at the conclusion of your trial when the judge sentenced you? She was more affected that you were—than Rosalind even."

I shook my head to indicate that I could no further follow his intellectual researches and rehashes of the past. Intricate theorizing seemed to me futile endeavor. My mind was cold; there was no limberness about its response to mental stimuli. As it worked out, there was no necessity of bothering ourselves with speculating as to what she would do or what her motives might be.

It all came to naught. The Governor saw her, listened to her plea and respectfully declined to overrule the decision of the court.

I heard about it on the afternoon of the day before the day set for my execution. They were already erecting the gallows in the prison yard. The actual structure was mercifully out of my sight, but I could hear the hammering, and I knew what it was. Everything else about the prison seemed hushed and subordinate to that heavy pounding. That night Rosalind came to bid me fare—

No, it isn't possible even now to write that word or to think of there ever being a good-by spoken by either of us to the other.

CHAPTER XXVI

MOSTLY we didn't say anything—Rosalind and I—on that occasion. There was so much to tell that it seemed futile to begin, with only so short a time left. So I only looked long and silently at her dear face, trying to print on my soul a reproduction of it that would last me through eternity.

And after all, there was little use to tell with lips what we both knew. You couldn't say in words the things that were in the sad, deep pools of Rosalind's eyes. I wondered,—and I think that thought racked me most of all,—I wondered if she would ever get over the hurt that was there. You couldn't go through life with eyes that suffered so much as that, dry, burnt-out eyes that have exhausted the cooling balm of tears.

Of course we didn't mention that I was going away in the morning. We had so few topics of conversation except those connected with tragedy! And Rosalind wasn't like that at all—she was made for gayety and laughter. We spoke of the *Lady Leslie* and wondered what had become of her since I had turned her loose in the storm, with the engine running. The yacht we mentioned too—her yacht now. A tug had pulled it from the beach, and it was in dry-dock, being overhauled.

Rosalind spoke casually of her husband.

"Mr. King is in the hospital yet," she said, "but he is getting better now. The doctor says I can take him home next week."

So she was living in King's house! The idea was repellent to me somehow, but on reflection I could think of nowhere else that she might have gone. Pleasure Island was no place for a girl to live alone even before the fire. And she had no relatives to go to.

It was rather a terrifying situation for a girl who had been sheltered from all contact with the world, to be suddenly thrown upon her own resources, with not a person left in whom she could trust. Even I—and she would have placed herself in my hands except for the interference of the law—had not been a factor in life as she had known it up to her twenty-fifth birthday. No; she was an inexperienced fledgling attempting to learn flying all by herself during a hurricane.

And I, possibly the only human being who really loved her, would not be able even to offer moral support. Perhaps King, when he got well, would be a changed man. Perhaps the accident and physical suffering would make him sober and kind—I hoped so—but not too kind, not so kind that he would ever replace me in her heart.

IT was the prison chaplain who came to take her away; that was kinder than sending a guard in uniform. The chaplain was a little old man with the deliberately pleasant expression that religious men, hospital nurses and unmarried women under thirty are obliged to cultivate.

"I waited as long as possible," he said by way of apology. His forefinger was in the prayer-book at the place where he was going to begin to read to me. "The warden says you must go for the present."

For the present! For all time unless there be a future life, which is something the Creator allows condemned men to doubt in the hour before execution!

At that moment there came to me the panic that is said to seize men who

know the hour of their doom. All my self-possession shattered to tiny little bits and fled from me like globules of mercury upon a marble slab. I couldn't pull myself together. I wanted to cry out against the inhumanity of the law that presumed to set itself over human life, to punish man by depriving him of the chance of redemption.

And then I looked at Rosalind. There was something so piteous and yet so trusting in her eyes that I pulled myself together with an effort. She expected me to be a man, and I would do it, at least until she left. I held out my arms to her. It was as if they closed upon nothing when she came to me. There was an utter absence of physical sensation that even then seemed impossible. That I should ever touch even the tips of Rosalind's fingers without a thrill appears incredible. All that I was conscious of was that she was frail, very frail, her girlish shoulders very thin and substanceless.

And when our lips met, hers were dry and harsh; our kiss was mechanical. By such absence of expression did I measure the depth of her emotion—because, by a strange paradox, after a certain point, the more you feel the less you express. I, who have gone to the limit of human psychological endurance, know.

She looked back as she went away, looked back every step, as if to say the million things we ought to say. Then she was gone, and the door shut. Only her eyes were still in the cell.

CHAPTER XXVII

PERHAPS you have wondered at the newspaper accounts of how every condemned criminal goes to the gallows or to the chair with unfaltering step and no sign of flinching. Wonder no longer. It is easy. An opiate does the trick for the veriest coward. Executioners are, after all, only men themselves, and a scene on the scaffold or in the lethal chamber is just as unnerving to them as it would be to you.

And so it is not only in hospitals that death is cheated with drugs. "Twilight sleep" was not first discovered as an aid to birth; it has long been the usher of mortality. It is well that it is so. It is a merciful thing not to drive a man mad before he goes to meet his God.

Therefore the "brave-to-the-last" victim of the law who walks so steadily between the two guards who support him on either side is often insensible to pain or emotion of any kind. He still controls his muscles, but with a long-distance control that has nothing of the personal about it. He directs the movements of a strange man whom he is not interested in. A cannon discharged near by would scarcely cause him to turn his head.

It was not yet daylight when the pathetic farce of a "hearty breakfast" was enacted by and for me. I know little of what happened. Evidently they feared a breakdown on my part, because my sensations and mental processes were beautifully numb. I don't know whether the stuff was in the coffee or what, but I am positive that during the events of the next hour I was not completely cognizant of everything that went on around me. I knew that there were movements and sounds, but they came to me distantly as if muffled and obscured by a fog.

There were the usual formalities: the reading of the warrant of execution; the conference with the warden; the prayers and the march from the death-cell to the courtyard, accompanied by the rattling of cell-doors, which is prison etiquette for "godspeed."

THE dawn was very young yet; one could see, but only vaguely. It was cool too; the guards who paced the prison wall wore their overcoats. I shivered a little and wished futilely that I had worn my winter underwear. I cursed myself for such an inane thought.

The scaffold was in a sort of niche in the courtyard. There was a windowless wing of the main prison building adjacent to the high wall itself that made a secluded spot out of sight of the cell windows. Thither I was conducted. The scaffold was not as I imagined it.

Perhaps pictures of Robin Hood highwaymen on Gallows Hill had colored my conception. Anyway, the single-arm gibbet of romance does not prevail any more. The modern structure is a solid beam supported at both ends with a perfectly efficient stage-trap under it. I recognized the latter instantly even in my semistupefied condition. I guess the drug acted like that, letting me grasp minor details without sensing the really important things.

After another prayer I was asked if I had anything to say before sentence was executed. I shook my head. Even if the most vehement protest against the injustice of my punishment had been in my mind, I doubt if my lips could have uttered it. But no such protest was in me anywhere. I was quite indifferent.

They adjusted the hood.

And then, with that black thing over my head and all outside sights cut off, I became aware of a sensation that I dimly recollected to have had before. It wasn't so much a sensation as it was a sort of a message that some one seemed to be trying to send me. I groped to define it, to locate its source. Did it come to me via the sense of touch or smell or sight or hearing? Wait; that was it—hearing. I was hearing something, something far away but drawing nearer.

It was muffled staccato drumming, and I had heard it before, had heard it on the nights when Mr. Joy and Mr. Spring-Gilbert had met up with death.

That was strange. Why did it come again when I was about to die?

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALL activity around me ceased. I wondered if the time had come. My senses were beginning to awaken to painful alertness; my mind was struggling free of its bonds. The teasing recurrence of that drumming sound had aroused chambers in my brain that had not been affected by drugs. I braced myself not to cry out when the trap beneath my feet fell away.

But the suspense was prolonged. The clatter of drumming grew stronger. It was punctuated by louder, more irregular concussions—rifle-shots. Then the drumming was answered by another ripping discharge—one of the machine-guns on the prison walls, I surmised.

But the staccato drumming grew louder, became rapid explosions in fact, sharper and more distinct. And then absolute silence. It must have been ten seconds before anyone did or said anything.

And then a voice spoke—a voice which I did not recognize:

"This gun plants a bullet every six inches along the line of light. If anybody moves except as I direct, I'll turn it loose."

There was more impressive silence.

"Chaplain," directed the stranger, "release the noose and remove that hood."

With fumbling fingers some one relieved me of the articles enumerated, and I stood blinking at an altered world. There in front of the scaffold rested a huge biplane. I had read just enough about aviation to know that in general it was something like the regular army scouting-machine, but I had never seen even a picture of one equipped in just the fashion of the one which stood before me. A machine-gun was mounted forward. I presume there is nothing unusual about that nowadays. But further, it had a powerful but quite small searchlight mounted on the gun itself.

THAT it was very powerful was proven by the fact that even in the light of dawn, it still cast an unmistakable shaft of radiance of its own. This searchlight was at present adjusted to throw a small pencil of light. The gun was set on a swivel of some sort so that it could be swung from side to side. The restless finger of light from the searchlight swept back and forth over the group around the scaffold, touching each of us in turn. Wherever the light pointed, the barrel of the gun was aimed directly at the same spot.

I remembered distinctly when and where I had seen the same effect. It was my first night on Pleasure Island, and the place was the bed which I had

vacated just in time to escape being shot seven or eight times in rapid succession. I wondered why the guards on the walls did not pick off the arrogant intruder with their rifles, and I looked up to see if they were aiming at him. There were no guards. Even while I was looking for them, something fell, writhing, from the wall to the prison yard below. One of the wounded guards had rolled to the edge of the masonry in his agony and had fallen over.

But events were moving too rapidly for the contemplation of anyone else's troubles. My attention was recalled to the airplane by the barking utterances of the man behind the gun. He talked like an unmuffled motor himself.

"Mr. James, drop to the rear, crouch low so that, if I have to shoot, you will not get hit. I am aiming level with the heart. Keep under that. Circle to the right widely out of range and get into the observer's seat."

My reawakening brain managed to grasp the fact that the airman had come with friendly intention toward me. Why, I could not imagine. It was no one I knew. Even though he was swathed in a helmet and flying clothes, I was quite sure of that. His voice was utterly strange to me.

IT was no time to stand upon the order of my going. I doubted whether I could really escape for any length of time, but it was worth trying. I couldn't possibly be any worse off than I was.

Following instructions I crouched low and circled in back of my erstwhile keepers until I was out of range of the machine-gun and its pointing ray. When I was around in back of the airplane, the aviator halted me. "Twist the stick before you get in," he said in an undertone. I looked blank. "The 'stick' is the propeller blade," he translated. "Turn it over once to start the motor."

The machine was the kind which is known as a tractor, that is, with the propeller blade in front. The gun is aimed and timed to shoot between revolutions of the arms.

The motor started easily and slowly, slowly enough so that I could see the propeller blade revolving.

"Hop in!"

Both seats were equipped with a full set of controls. The pilot was occupying the right-hand seat, so I climbed into the other.

"Dual-control machine," he explained over his shoulder. 'Don't touch anything. Heavy cap and coat there for you."

I put on the clothing designated as the motor began to revolve more rapidly. There was a little more pull in it, and the machine began to tremble a trifle. Then it started, veered quickly, and headed for the most distant prison wall, clattering like a giant lunatic clock. I wondered if the pilot was mad, to drive full tilt and head-on into a stone wall like the one surrounding the prison yard. I shut my eyes and hung on for the shock as the wall seemed to race to meet us.

THEN the jarring ceased. It was as if we were running on soft grass. But there wasn't any grass in the prison yard, so I opened my eyes to see.

Of course—we were in the air. In some miraculous way the prison walls were falling away from us. I looked down and back at the penitentiary. Grotesque, squat little figures were crawling about rapidly, and puffs of smoke occasionally enveloped them. They were shooting at us, although I could hear no sound.

The knowledge that I was under fire made me dodge. I rather laughed at myself for doing it, because there was no possible chance of evading a bullet destined for me. With the machine moving better than fifty miles an hour, any infinitesimal movement that I might make would cut no figure. Besides, there was little chance of their hitting us on the wing, so to speak.

Cold air struck my face like a douche of ice-water. We had risen to a stratum of atmosphere several degrees lower in temperature than that near the earth. But its sting was exhilarating. Below, the earth was settling away to a miniature map. We must be climbing fast. And yet I was conscious of no motion, of no feeling of insecurity.

On the contrary I could have gone to sleep as easily as not, lulled by the deep-toned clatter of the motor.

Looking back, I could see the prison dwindling toward the horizon. The sun was coming up behind it, blotting it out in a blaze of glory. Ahead of us was the cold, dim world unlighted by the wave of gold that was rolling toward it. We were flying with the vanguard of the dawn, keeping just ahead of the sunrise.

Therefore we were going west. Where? I hadn't stopped to think yet about why anything had happened or what the next move might be. The identity of the swathed and hooded figure in the seat beside me was still as much a mystery as ever.

ALL I knew was that some one had taken rather extraordinary means to pull me out of a desperate situation. If it had not been for the timely arrival of help, the rising sun would have discovered nothing of me but a lifeless body. Now I had a fighting chance, and my spirits soared on the wings of the morning. It's strange what a difference a little hope makes in your mental and physical reaction. Half an hour before, I had been a sick man, stupefied by disaster; now I could feel strength and self-confidence coming back to me in great surges.

The man in the other seat scarcely stirred. An occasional movement of the wheel, forward or back or a little to one side, was the only evidence he gave that he was in control of the machine. Every movement that he made was duplicated in the set of controls which stood before my seat. I was fascinated to watch them and to calculate what each variation meant. I have said that I was interested in machinery. This was a new kind, and I had an amateur mechanic's insatiable desire to probe its mysteries.

Fast as we were going, the sunrise went faster, unrolling the entire country before us like a scroll. Cities broke through the horizon and slipped under us like flies on a machine-shop pulley-belt. We crossed a shining silver river —a railway train was crawling over it at the same time on a narrow trestle; we were almost out of sight before the long serpent of trailing freight-cars had negotiated the bridge.

I made up my mind then and there that if I were allowed to live, I should become the sole possessor of an airplane. It certainly is the ideal way to go down to your office of a summer morning. And how it does cleanse the soul of sordidness! Petty things fall away from you with the earth. I don't believe it would be possible, for instance, for any aviator to covet his neighbor's wife while "looping the loop" or doing a "tail-spin."

WE were headed west, of course. That much I deduced from the persistency with which the sun remained at our backs. I tried to inquire once of the pilot beside me where we were, but desisted when I realized how puny my voice was compared to the roar of the motor. I had grown so used to the racket that I had forgotten its volume until I tried to compete with it.

Several hours out we raised a large city covered with a pall of smoke. My guess was Pittsburgh, although my knowledge of the layout of the city was not sufficient for me to verify my surmise.

Ahead of us, just before we flew over the main part of the town, several airplanes rose simultaneously from the smoke like a covey of partridges emerging from cover. They climbed hastily in long spirals, their white planes flashing in the sun like the underside of a gull's wing.

I was so interested in their beauty that the thought did not occur to me that they might be trying to cut us off.

But the pilot, whoever he was, did not share my indifference to their intention. When the entire fleet was only a few hundred feet below us and directly ahead, he made a sudden shift of the controls, and we shot up with tremendously accelerated speed directly over the place where we must have met in another few seconds.

The hostile purpose of the other "planes" became obvious immediately even to me. All spiraling ceased, and they all straightened out in direct pursuit. But they had no chance. Our ma-

chine was too fast. I almost fancied I could hear our pilot chuckle as we swept magnificently through space at a clip which left our pursuers standing still in the air. In ten or fifteen minutes they abandoned the fruitless pursuit and turned back to the city. But the incident proved that the prison authorities were not sleeping. We had been watched ever since we left, and our route telegraphed ahead. Probably half the field-glasses in the countryside were trained on us just at that moment.

WE had been too fast for the machines sent out to intercept us at Pittsburgh, but would our luck hold? Might there not be some speedier craft along our path that could be hastily requisitioned by the police, a machine as much faster than ours as ours was faster than the ordinary ones? If there were, then what?

I was not free of the noose yet. Even if we were not overtaken by another airplane, how could we replenish our supply of gasoline? That was a problem which worried me considerably, and I teased my mind with a review of expedients that might be feasible, such as holding up a garage at the point of our machine-gun. The trouble with that was to get near enough to a garage. Usually they are in streets with other buildings, and a street is no place for an airplane-landing. It would be practically impossible for us to land in the outskirts of a town and walk in and back with gasoline. It would take too much time, and we would be captured sure.

No; my hold on hope seemed to depend entirely on the capacity of the gasoline reservoir. Once we were on the ground, my chances of eluding pursuit were insignificant. The entire country must be aroused by now, and my description was doubtless in the hands of every policeman and sheriff in the United States. I could imagine my photograph enlarged on the front page of all the newspapers, with a large reward offered for my apprehension or death. It was a wild game—my unknown ally and myself against the nation. Also I began to notice the pangs of hunger. It had been quite a while since I had partaken of my "last hearty breakfast," and breathing the rarefied air of the upper lanes all the morning would sharpen the dullest of appetites.

Over the pilot's shoulder I could see his clock. It was one-thirty. While I was considering the hopelessness of our plight, the plane tilted a little, and we swung around to a line of flight with the sun on our left. I would have known that we changed position even without the sun, because a sharp wind struck my cheek. We had been flying with the wind all the morning, and there was a distinct difference. Now began a series of wide circles with our left wing banked to the outside. I wondered if the aviator had gone crazy or had lost control of his steering apparatus. He seemed calm and unexcited. He was looking toward the earth. I followed the direction of his gaze, wondering what it might be that he was searching for. Apparently he found it because he altered the direction of the machine sharply and cut off the motor.

WE began to swoop toward the earth. When I discovered that we were not falling, my confidence returned. There must be some reason for this descent. I leaned over to watch the ground. There was nothing below us, but open fields marked off into regular little squares by cultivation. It was almost a checkerboard with different colored segments, some brown where the earth had been newly plowed, some yellow with unharvested grain, and some green, probably pasture land.

The only way I could tell that we were descending was that these squares were rapidly growing larger, coming up to meet us. We seemed to have a definite aim; and following the direction in which we were headed, I discovered in one of the checkered fields a huge white cross upon the ground. It was laid out against a background of newly plowed earth, and therefore was very distinct. Obviously that was what the pilot had been hunting for.

In perhaps two or three minutes we were flying close to the ground; and just as we skimmed the white cross, he suddenly tilted our wings for a minute,

and we settled back gently and lightly onto the earth between two arms of the cross. It was to me a marvelous bit of piloting, although I believe such nicety of steering is no matter for wonder to veteran airmen. I could see as we came nearer that the signal cross was composed of two strips of wide white cloth laid across each other. I suppose that from arm to arm the device measured one hundred and fifty feet.

When we landed, the pilot climbed stiffly from his seat and motioned me to do likewise. It seemed strange to touch the solid earth once more. Frankly, it was disappointing to have to move with your own muscles, and I felt singularly chained. There is no use talking, the air does spoil you for locomotion of any sort on the ground. Even an automobile has wheels of lead.

THE pilot removed his hood and mask. I had my first glimpse of his face. He was a young man, just about of age I should say, dark and with a drooping, unhappy mouth, and eyes that slept with a curious smoldering fire in them. I at once liked the boy and felt afraid of him. I was sorry for him in a way, because there were so many traces of suffering in his face; and yet, if you can understand what I mean, I felt that I would have preferred to feel sorry for him at a distance.

After I had seen him, I forbore to ask impertinent questions about his identity. I felt sure, some way, that he would resent it. He was no one that I knew—that was certain; and if he cared to reveal who he was, that was his own affair. I certainly owed him a great deal, my life presumably, and I would ill repay him by prying into his private affairs.

"Where are we?" That was a question I could ask.

"Not far from Dayton," he replied. His voice under normal conditions was curiously pleasant, soft and low like a girl's.

"Isn't it dangerous hereabouts?" I hazarded. "There must be some fast machines in the Wright factories."

He nodded. "Yes; but nothing any faster than this one, I think. We had to stop, anyway. This is about as far as we can go without more gas. Help me with these tanks."

I hadn't noticed before, but now I saw why the cross had been placed in that field. At its center and under a strip of canvas fastened down on either side was a group of five-gallon red cans. The young man grabbed two of them and signified that I should do the same. We had filled the almost empty tank of the airplane inside of five minutes. Gasoline was not the only kind of fuel which had been stored at the sign of the cross. There was also a basket of food and a vacuum bottle of coffee. The latter was almost boiling hot, thus proving that the supplies had been left there within twenty-four hours.

"WE'LL eat this stuff here," the young man directed, as he offered me the basket. "No further stop until near St. Louis to-night."

I accepted the food without question, and we ate, seated upon the ground. I noticed as I sat facing him that my rescuer wore upon the collar of his overgarment what I took to be the insignia of the United States Army Aviation Corps. That was curious. Surely my rescue could not be an official act of the Government.

And the line of our flight—why start from the Atlantic coast on a route through Pittsburgh, Dayton and St. Louis? As far as I could remember the map, that was a general southwesterly direction. Where did it lead?

"Mexico?" I hazarded out loud.

"Yes," he replied to my question and also to my line of thought. "Only place you are safe at present."

My benefactor was not much of a conversationalist. He seemed morose and dissatisfied. I thought then that possibly that was a characteristic of airmen, but I have learned since that quite the contrary is the case. They are as jovial and care-free a crew as the racing drivers of automobiles. Danger doesn't dampen the spirits. On the contrary it elevates them.

After we had finished our lunch, he opened a suit-case which had been left with our supplies and produced from it what at first appeared to be a suit of

overalls but which upon closer examination proved to be a one-piece aviator's uniform similar to the one he was wearing himself.

"Put it on," he ordered. "We'll burn your clothes here."

I got the idea. Clad as I was when I left the prison, my identification was absurdly simple. In a regulation flying costume I might pass as a pupil of the aviation school. I was all dressed and putting on the hood when the pilot uttered a sharp exclamation and ran to the machine.

"Plane coming," he explained briefly, scanning the sky. "After us. Hurry." We abandoned everything just as it was on the ground and hastened back to the machine. He gave the propeller a twist, and we climbed in. It was a good field for a take-off, not jarry, although a trifle soft for getting up speed.

I HADN'T as yet seen the cause of his uneasiness, nor had I heard it. His senses must have been attuned to a finer discrimination than mine; but now as we left the ground, my eye caught the flashing reflection of what at first seemed to be a huge motionless kite high in the sky. But it grew larger and was coming up like a summer squall, and now I could see that it was a large biplane coming along at a tremendous rate of speed.

Of course there was always a chance that it was simply an experimental machine from the Wright factory, but the fact that it circled directly over us practically removed all doubt in that direction. It might be from the Wright factory, but there was little question but that it was out looking for us. Now began as tidy an aëronautical duel as you could ordinarily hope to see.

This was no child's play such as the race with the Pittsburgh airplanes had been. Our single opponent this time was equipped with a first-class express plane, and he was a tremendously skillful and reckless driver. Also he carried a rapid-fire gun. Fortunately the latter is useless unless it is practically level with its target.

And the driver of our machine was a resourceful individual full of tricks that I did not dream existed in the flying game. He maneuvered our craft with swift darts, sudden settlings and a wide corkscrew spiral to a position above the pursuing craft. All the time the other fellow was trying to prevent our getting above him. It reminded me a great deal of jockeys maneuvering for position at the start of a race. Once, when we were nearly level with him, the pilot of the pursuing plane turned loose his machine-gun. I couldn't hear anything above the noise of the motor, but a ragged hole appeared in one of our planes.

ONCE we were above our pursuer, the young man in the driver's seat let loose a burst of speed that he had held in reserve so far. There was nothing to judge by except the revolutions of the motor, but I could tell that they were much faster than they had been. The explosion from the exhaust was practically a hum. But the other plane had reserve speed too. We did not leave it behind, but it hung in the air about half a mile in our rear just as if we were tied together with a cable.

It was a grim pursuit. The pilot of the machine behind wasted only occasional shots at us and seemed determined to come to close quarters. But I could not see that he was gaining any. Possibly he was simply holding us in sight with the expectation of being reinforced by other machines.

When I discovered that there was no immediate danger of capture, I began studying my own pilot's methods. From the duplicate set of controls in front of myself, I could see every movement that he made. When he tilted forward, mine tilted also. I discovered that this altered the direction of the plane downward and that a backward tilt caused us to climb. He seemed to make very slight adjustments of the balancing wings or *ailerons*. I learned later that our machine was practically held in balance by a gyrostat and that lateral adjustments were almost entirely unnecessary.

Mentally I followed the young man's movements. I was learning a great deal about airplanes, and I tried to figure out in advance what I would do to meet each condition. It might come handy

sometime, I thought, to know the methods used by this first-class aviator.

I had plenty of opportunity, because we kept right on all the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXIX

BUT along toward late afternoon something went wrong with our engine. One of the cylinders refused to stay on duty all of the time and choked and spluttered intermittently even when it was at its best. The young pilot made several adjustments, but the recalcitrant cylinder refused to pick up. We volplaned for nearly half a mile while he fussed with the spark and carburetor controls. We lost altitude and distance by cutting off our power, and our pursuing nemesis closed up the gap between us. A bullet zipping through our canvas was his warning and challenge.

My pilot looked around to calculate the distance which separated us and shook his head.

"Got to fight him—only chance!" he shouted. The motor was not running, and so I could hear him.

I nodded. It seemed that he must be right. He reached into a holster strapped to the machine and brought out an automatic which he passed to me. I took it with a hand that I am willing to admit shook with excitement. This idea of shooting to kill up in the air gives me a squeamish sensation. It's such a long ways to fall if you get hit. The aviator started our crippled engine once more; and after speed had come back to her, he tilted his planes and rose in a sweeping circle to the right.

Our pursuer apparently understood the maneuver. He dropped to our level and circled the other way. As the two planes came head-on, each driver let go with his machine-gun. It was almost exactly the tactics of a medieval tilting tournament with machine-guns for lances and airplanes for mounts. I didn't think of that then. The whining bullets about us successfully filled all my thoughts. The ones that went through our canvas pattered like raindrops upon an umbrella. The noise of our own gun was not so noticeable—it was nearly in tune with the exhaust of the engine. Almost continuous sputtering flames flashed at the barrel, however, and I knew that we must be sending as good as we got.

AND then the sputtering machine-rifle ceased its clatter, and the man beside me bowed his head limply across the wheel in front of him. I started to reach over to touch him to see what was the matter when a dreadful sickening sensation caused me to look ahead and through the propeller blade.

We had ceased all lateral progress and were diving headforemost toward the earth at a rate of speed absolutely appalling. The pilot, in falling across his controls, had shifted everything forward, and we were doing the first part of a loop that would land us upside down in a few seconds.

I don't know how I managed to do it,—I suppose the movement was the instinctive one of horror,—but I jerked back on the wheel in front of me. Slowly, oh so slowly, the plane righted. My very soul hung by a spider thread until we finally began to stretch out on an even keel once more. Our pursuer held his fire. Either our dive had spoiled his aim or else he was waiting to see if it would be necessary to expend any more ammunition to finish us.

It required considerable effort to hold the machine on a level course. The entire weight of the man in the other seat was resting against the controls, and I had to overcome that resistance as well as counteract the natural tendency of the boat to dive.

A convulsive movement of the wounded man made it even more difficult to hold the wheel. He was trying to sit upright, and to do so was pushing with all his might against the tiller post. At least I judge that his effort was to sit up. I scarcely believe that he was deliberately trying to make the plane dive.

With a shudder he managed to sit erect. As he did so, the motor stopped. I don't know whether he cut off the spark or what. Possibly his foot disconnected a wire. At any rate the hum of the motor was suddenly superseded by the deathlike calm of absolute space.

HE twisted around toward me and pulled off his hood and threw it away. I had time to notice it whirling end over end as it fell and wondered if a man would fall like that.

"He got me," the pilot gasped. "Here in the chest. Done for, I think. Can you volplane to earth?"

I nodded. "I think so."

Imitating the landing I had seen him make earlier in the day, I was directing a long glide toward the distant earth.

"Pretty fair," he commended. "Listen, James. They wont catch me now. Tell you something. I killed Joy. See? That's why I came after you. Didn't want you to get hung—my account."

My mind was too much occupied with the intricacies of my first aërial landing to grasp the significance of what he was saying. We appeared to be coming down altogether too fast for comfort. It did not seem possible for us to collide with a solid body such as the earth at that rate of speed without doing considerable damage. It had been only a few moments before, that the river below had been a mere thread and a village on one bank of it only a dot on the map. Now the river was a broad ribbon, and the village was beginning to widen out and separate into individual buildings, all of which looked very hard and pointed when you considered them as places to light.

I circled away from the town and avoided a patch of woods that lay on one side of it. My luck was good, and I found a field that I could hit. I dropped into it, not without a sickening jolt that broke some of my stay wires, but nevertheless right side up.

ALL my desire for aviation left me, temporarily at least, at that moment. The feel of solid earth beneath me that did not slip away toward the rear like an endless belt was a reassuring sensation. The muscles of my back were strained from the needless intensity with which I had steered. Even my facial muscles were set and stiff, and my eyes burned from the strain of making the landing.

Therefore, regardless of consequences, I sat still a few seconds, recovering my poise and adjusting my system back to normal. It was then that I realized for the first time the significance of the confession which the young aviator had made. He had killed Joy. I was no longer in jeopardy of the law.

Who he might be or what his reasons had been for murdering the owner of Pleasure Island really mattered little. The fact that he admitted the crime was the essential thing so far as I was concerned.

I am afraid that at the moment my exultation at being relieved of the pall which had hung over me for so long overrode my sympathy and humanitarian impulses. It seemed heartless to have any cause for rejoicing and to take time for it just then; but I hope I may be forgiven, and I know I will be by those who have stood in the shadow of death and have had it suddenly lifted.

But in a moment other impulses supervened, and I clambered stiffly out of my seat to the ground and went to the young aviator's assistance. He was limp, and his body leaned against the webbing which was placed to prevent him from pitching forward. I unloosened that and lifted him from the seat.

I knew when I felt his inert weight in my arms that he was dead.

CHAPTER XXX

ALL my dreams of freedom and a restoration to the good opinion of society vanished in one crashing second. What good was his confession? No one had heard it but myself. Could I prove anything? I didn't even know who he was. Except that I had gained possibly twenty-four hours of life I was right where I stood with the noose around my neck.

A black shadow swept across me and the dead man. I looked up and dodged instinctively. The airplane which had pursued us was making a landing. The driver sat still in his seat, surveying the scene with a calculating eye. His mask was off, and I could see his face. He was one of those grinning, good-natured chaps, rather guileless, but a dare-devil with no respect for his own safety whatever.

Seeing that I made no hostile movement, he climbed out of the cockpit of his machine and came toward me.

"Is he dead?" he inquired with some awe in his voice. I judged somehow that this was the first time he had ever killed a man.

"Yes," I admitted shortly.

"I'm sorry," the youth regretted, "but at that he might just as well be shot to-day as hung to-morrow. The reward is the same for him, dead or alive, and by this time to-morrow I will be counting those five one-thousand-dollar bills and wondering where I am going to spend my vacation."

It dawned upon me then that the young man had made the quite natural mistake of thinking that the man who had been killed was the one for whom the reward had been offered. He thought that he was gazing upon the corpse of Fritz James, convicted slayer. This was not unnatural as I came to figure it out later, because after the pilot had been killed, I had made a fairly creditable landing. Quite naturally our pursuer had thought that I was the aviator and the dead man the passenger. We were dressed practically alike.

"Well," observed the pilot philosophically, "this poor devil is better off as he is. I suppose I had better be starting back with him."

He looked over our machine carefully. "Your plane isn't safe," he decided. "Some of the struts are broken. You will have to go back with me. I suppose this guy James paid you enough to buy you a couple of extra ones, anyhow. That was sure some stunt you did, yanking him off the scaffold. Lend a hand here."

HIS biplane was a larger one than that we had been riding in. There was room for two passengers, one on either side of the pilot. We lifted the body of my rescuer and strapped him into the seat to the right. The pilot indicated that I should sit at his left.

There seemed to be nothing to do but comply. To run away now would obviate whatever advantage I had in being mistaken for some one else. I felt sure that the comradeship which had been so freely offered to me as a fellow-aviator would be instantly supplanted by hostility if he discovered that I was the man for whom the reward had been offered.

The air-pilot started his engine and climbed aboard. It was a sturdy machine, and we rose easily in spite of the extra weight. We were strange passengers, a convicted murderer and a dead man. Little did the jovial young aviator know what a curious cargo he was carrying.

As soon as we were high in the air, we turned tail upon the sun and fled toward the east. When we were once started upon our backward journey, I was almost overwhelmed by an imperative desire to cry out, to protest against being carried to the unfair doom that had been prepared for me over there. I could see my chance for life and freedom slipping away. There had to be some way out. I was already nearly a thousand miles on my way toward freedom, and to go back was heartbreaking.

Quite by accident, because I had forgotten it entirely, my right hand struck the automatic I had slipped in my pocket. It was the weapon which had been given me when our battle in the air started. When I touched it, my mind settled to a cold, clear determination. My captor had been so sure that I was a fellow-airman simply out to make what I could by rescuing a man from the gallows that he had not thought to search me for weapons. Of course his idea was that with my passenger dead, it made no difference what happened to me next—that I would certainly put up no fight on behalf of an employer whose need for defense had ended. Providence had given me one more chance for escape. I would be a fool not to take it. No matter what happened, I could not be in any worse plight than if I were returned to prison.

I HAD little hope of being able to establish any support for the confession which the dead man had made. What weight would that unverified testimony in my favor have against Mrs. Strang's recorded evidence that she had seen me fire the shot? None whatever. If Providence intended me to escape,

it was to be solely through my own efforts. She had shown the way and left the details to me. It did not require a great deal of ingenuity to hit upon the simplest and most practical plan. I slipped the automatic from my pocket, and choosing a propitious moment, jammed it forcibly into the side of the young aviator whose two hands were occupied with the wheel. He looked at me in surprise and protest; but when he saw the gun, an impression of incredible and ludicrous dismay crossed his features. He knew then of the blunder he had made.

With my free arm I described a half-circle, pointing to the rear. He interpreted my gesture correctly for, after a moment's hesitation, he nodded and banked the right wing as we circled to the left. Fortunately I remembered the compass-reading by which we had headed before the trouble began. I wasn't quite sure what my plans were; but St. Louis had seemed to be the next stopping place on the route of my dead rescuer, and I could think of nothing better immediately than to follow out his plan. I would have some time to work out details before we arrived.

While I was thinking, the aviator stopped his motor, intentionally I presume. I imagine he thought that I didn't know enough about it to tell how it happened.

But he made a mistake. I read his purpose and was plenty desperate enough to frustrate it at all cost.

"Start that motor," I shouted, and then I pointed to his barometer. "If you drop a thousand feet, I'll shoot. Keep her up."

I must have put the required emphasis in my speech, because his eye wavered, and he reached for the spark control.

"Before you start, listen!" I continued. "We go to St. Louis. Keep her headed as you are."

"I have been there," he returned. "I know the landmarks."

"Good," I commended. "Let her go."

THE motor started, and we rose once more to as high an altitude as we had had when the motor was cut off. The aviator proved to be very tractable. I presume my reputation as a murderer helped considerably, but at that I did not relax my vigilance. I kept the nose of the automatic pressed suggestively against his ribs. It was just as well not to let him forget what was coming to him if he tried any funny business.

By rough calculation I estimated that we were only a couple of hundred miles from St. Louis when we had ascended this last time. Even allowing for the extra weight, it seemed quite possible that the biplane was making a hundred miles an hour. Therefore I watched the earth below us carefully for the signs of a great city. I felt quite sure that St. Louis would be unmistakable when we approached it. I would know it by the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

Somewhere outside of that city I was confident that I would find another of the white crosses which were a signal and a guide. I had to make a landing somewhere, and it seemed as well to hunt up the white-cross signal, which was bound to be a secluded spot, and if necessary I could tie up my pilot securely and get quite a ways away before local pursuit was organized. The light was waning swiftly, and I scanned the horizon anxiously for some sign of my journey's end. Just at dusk the smoke cloud of the city began to come toward us, and I sighed with relief. From the air there is no mistaking the location of large industrial towns. They are foul blotches upon the purity of nature.

I signaled to my pilot that he should fly low, and we descended. Luck was with me. We didn't even have to circle to find the white cross. It was there about fifteen miles outside of town directly in our course. I pointed to it and framed the word "land" with my lips, emphasizing it at the same time by a slight push with the barrel of my gun. He understood and shifted his controls as he cut off the engine.

WE swooped silently to the earth, landing gently, as the other young man had done, very near to the center of the cross. I scrambled out of the seat but kept my gun directed at my

quasi-prisoner. I wasn't sure what the next move was going to be, but I wanted to get my feet on the ground to think.

In the waning dusk I was surprised to see advancing toward us the figure of a woman. As it came closer I made out with amazement a form and features that I knew. It was the last person I expected to find. It was Mrs. Strang. My surprise was not the only one. She surveyed us coolly and appraisingly, and then her gaze fell upon the lifeless body of the man strapped in the airplane. A look of overwhelming grief convulsed her features as she realized that the figure was that of a dead man. She stepped quickly to the side of the machine and held out her hands.

"Harry!" she cried. "Harry!"

Before I could think what it all meant or patch my impressions together, I suddenly found myself knocked to the ground and rolling over and over in the bearlike embrace of the young aviator who had driven me on my last break for freedom.

In my surprise at Mrs. Strang's appearance and her recognition of the dead man, I inadvertently let the muzzle of the automatic waver. The young man had seized his opportunity.

CHAPTER XXXI

MY young friend, the aviator, got his five thousand dollars reward, all right. I was returned to prison, not without several bumps and cuts to testify to the final struggle for freedom which I put up. But he was a larger man than I and equally careless of his life.

At the State institution I was welcomed with a respect which I little expected to receive from prison officials. I was guarded more closely than a king on his way to coronation. I was the principal character in a new kind of escape, and they were taking no chances of my having something else equally ingenious up my sleeve. *Monte Cristo* was no more of a dare-devil in his time than I in mine. I imagine the newspapers had helped some. I have read some of the accounts since, that put to shame anything in the line of fiction I have ever been able to compose myself.

But I never stood in the shadow of the gallows again. Mrs. Strang's statement saved me. We had left her near the white cross, outside of St. Louis. She seemed to wish to be left alone with the body of the dead air-pilot. My struggle with the young man who was so intent on earning that five-thousand-dollar reward had left me so dazed that I did not realize that Mrs. Strang must hold the key to the situation and that I should not lose sight of her. It proved not to be necessary. She voluntarily asked for a hearing, and a special court was convened to take her statement. Only those vitally interested were allowed to be present.

It was at this hearing that I saw Rosalind for the first time since my escape and return to prison. I had not been allowed to have any visitors since I came back. But the brave smile she flashed at me across the courtroom was worth waiting for. It faded the sunshine that filtered through the dusty windows of that audience chamber.

THE reëxamination of Mrs. Strang occupied two sessions, because all of her former testimony had to be gone over bit by bit. I give excerpts from the court report here and there, omitting much that was mere repetition and including only what in my judgment has a direct bearing:

"Question: Do you wish to retract your statement that you saw Mr. Fritz James assault Mr. Joy with a deadly weapon, which assault resulted in the death of Mr. Joy?

"Answer: I do.

"Q.: How do you know that Mr. James did not fire the shot resulting in the death of Mr. Joy?

"A.: Because Mr. Joy was already dead when Mr. James entered the room."

This statement caused a mild sensation. Of course it was no surprise to me, but to everyone else in the courtroom it was an unexpected statement.

"Q.: Describe to the best of your ability how Mr. Joy met his death.

"A.: Mr. Joy and I were to be married, and all our plans had been made

to leave the next day. As has been shown in the original trial, Mr. Joy's stepdaughter would cease to be his care upon her attaining her twenty-fifth birthday, which was the day following the murder. According to the conditions of his wife's will, Mr. Joy was not allowed to marry until his stepdaughter was twenty-five years of age; but Mr. Joy had promised me many years before that he would make me his wife as soon as the terms of the will had been complied with. It was only for that reason that I stayed on as housekeeper on Pleasure Island so long as I did.

"Mr. Joy had converted most of his money and a great deal of his daughter's into platinum, and he was planning to give himself a little the best of it on the division. He had confided all his plans to me, I supposed, and I had prepared to spend the rest of my life as his wife. But on the eve of the murder I overheard Mr. Joy make the statement to Mr. James that he did not expect to carry out his promise of marriage to me. Quite naturally I was frantic. I had wasted all the best years of my life on that lonely island, and I could see all tangible fruits of my sacrifice slipping away.

"I DETERMINED to watch Mr. Joy. I am not sure what purpose I had in view, but I did not intend to have him leave without an understanding. I did not know to whom to turn for advice. But finally I sent for my son.

"Q.: Who is your son?

"A.: Henry Strang.

"Q.: How did you send for him?

"A.: By carrier pigeon. He was an instructor at the aviation training-camp not so very far from Pleasure Island. I asked him to come to me as soon as possible. Mr. Joy and I had a long discussion that evening as to our wedding-trip. He seemed perfectly frank with me, and I almost doubted having overheard his spoken intention to betray me. But I determined not to relax my vigilance; and later when I pretended to retire, I really stayed in the secret passage which connected my bungalow with Mr. Joy's apartment. The safe is down there, and I felt sure that he would not leave without first rifling the strong-box. My patience was rewarded. About an hour after I left him, he descended by means of his elevator down to the safe. He got out a great many bars of his platinum and took some of them up with him. Before he could come back for more I mounted the trap and followed him up.

"He was surprised and angry at my espionage. We quarreled, and he told me flatly that he would not marry me. It was while we were quarreling that my son arrived. He had obtained leave and came in an airplane. The boy was hot-headed. He assumed the quarrel and in the heat of it shot his father dead.

"Q.: His father?

"A.: Yes; Harry was born on Pleasure Island, but Mr. Joy sent him away to be cared for by institutions. Harry never forgave him and hated him from boyhood. I think that brooding over it made him a little queer.

"Q.: What did your son do after he killed his father?

"A.: He tried to get me to go with him, but I refused. After he left the room, I don't know what else happened because I fainted.

"Q.: Do you think he fired the shots at the bed which was usually occupied by Rosalind Joy?

"A.: I don't know. It is possible. He hated Mr. Joy's stepdaughter because he thought that she stood between him and an honorable name."

A DISCUSSION of this phase of the testimony occupied over an hour. I omit it, because it did not get anywhere. It seemed reasonable to suppose, however, that Henry Strang was the one who fired at the empty bed which I had just left on the night of the murder. This supposition is supported by the fact that he used a pistol and a searchlight somewhat similar to the one used on his airplane.

The next pertinent question follows:

"Q.: Why did you say you saw Mr. James kill Mr. Joy?"

"A.: In order to protect my son. I thought that if some one else were suspected, it would divert attention from him until he could get out of the coun-

try. Mr. James was the only possible person who could have done it, and he had fired a shot in the chemical laboratory and might have committed the crime.

"Q.: Having fastened the guilt on Mr. James, why did you help him escape from Pleasure Island by means of the secret passage?

"A.: So that there would not be any trial. I was afraid that if Mr. James were to receive a fair trial, he would be able to prove his innocence. In that case the real culprit might have been discovered. By fastening suspicion upon Mr. James and then helping him to escape, everyone would think he was unquestionably guilty and no further investigation would be made. Neither Harry nor myself wished anyone else to suffer for his misdeed. That is why Harry stopped the execution after every other attempt to save Mr. James' life had failed. We planned the rescue after I had made a fruitless appeal to the Governor for pardon. Harry was to carry Mr. James to Mexico, and I had gone ahead in order to have landing-sites and supplies along the route. It was only because I was delayed in St. Louis that I happened to be on the field when the airplane bearing my son's dead body arrived.

"It was useless to continue any further deception. My son had paid the penalty for what we had both done. His life had always been unhappy. Perhaps he has found consolation now. At any rate, I could do him no tangible good by lying for him further. For Mr. James' sake I have told the truth."

THE question as to whether Harry Strang had also shot Spring-Gilbert was not answered categorically. Mrs. Strang did not know; but she believed it was quite possible, because her son had hated everyone connected with the Joy fortune, and at the time Spring-Gilbert was killed, he was the technical heir. It was quite natural that Harry Strang should have felt resentment and anger at discovering that after Mr. Joy's death none of his fortune even would go to his mother or himself.

At any rate the charge of murdering Spring-Gilbert was never pressed against me, and my case was dismissed. Of course there was red tape about the actual release from custody, but I was allowed to be congratulated by my friends.

Dr. Canfield was the first one to reach out a hand to me.

"You don't know how glad I am, Fritz!" he exclaimed. "I knew it would come out all right. I have been keeping your old room for you at the sanitarium, and you can come back to it any time you wish."

I laughed. "Any time you catch me going from a prison to a sanitarium, you can present yourself with a gold-plated coal-scuttle. From now on I am going to live so as to keep out of both."

Rosalind was next. She gave me her hand shyly.

I took it with a sort of chill sensation. What really was the use of being free after all? She was Mrs. Victor King. She sensed my dismay.

"Mr. King is out of the hospital," she told me.

It was worse than I thought. So long as he stayed under doctors' care, she seemed not so irretrievably lost.

"That's good," I said. "I am glad that he is getting better."

"So am I," she agreed, "because just as soon as he is able to stand it we are going to have a legal annulment of our marriage. He has been awfully sweet about it, and as soon as I told him—" She paused.

"Told him what?" I inquired stupidly.

She didn't answer, but her cheeks were crimson with blushes.

"Did you tell him that you loved me?" I asked, oblivious of the courtroom.

"Well, not in so many words," she protested, "but he got the idea. Wait!" She stopped me. "After my marriage is annulled, I can't be married again for a year. That's the law."

"But there isn't any law," I pointed out, "that can prevent you from being kissed for a year—or if there is, I am going to break it."

And I did.

THE END

The Chink-Runner

& Frank Garbutt

WONG CHING FU gazed stolidly toward the setting sun. Except for the blinking eyes that squinted as, half blinded by the fast disappearing rays, he looked out to sea, the face might have been carved out of some old and yellow wood.

As the last rays of the sun disappeared, he turned back to the laundry and smiled. Wong was unhappy—and for good reason. His thoughts gave him no comfort. No solution to his difficulty was in sight.

Somewhere up the coast, a dingy little gasoline schooner was days overdue—and there was the probability that she had met disaster at the hands of the alert officers of the Immigration Bureau. In the bay, the *Juan de Dios* lay idly at anchor in charge of an officer and two men from the *resguardo;* her captain, Teddy Watch, the best Chink-runner in the business, was *incommunicado* in the *cuartel* on a charge of smuggling firearms. To make Wong's grief even more poignant, thirty prospective immigrants to the free United States, in the persons of thirty of his fellow-countrymen fresh from Hongkong via Mazatlan, awaited transportation across the border.

Fifty dollars apiece was ready to drop into Wong's itching palm the moment his charges were safely embarked upon the last stage of their journey; and two hundred each, or six thousand dollars in all, was already at his disposal to pay their passage from Ensenada to any part of the United States from which they could reach Chinatown in Los Angeles.

Wong was feeding thirty useless men in his little laundry, and his prospective profit was being diminished daily. His cup of bitterness was full.

NOT three blocks away, in an upper room of the *cuartel,* a man was seated on the floor, his back to the adobe wall. The room was barely twelve by twelve, with a ceiling fourteen feet in height, near which were two windows six by twelve inches each and without sash or glass. In consequence it was too dark to read even at midday.

The man arose, stretched himself, yawned and commenced a weary walk back and forth. He was, apparently, thirty—powerful, yet lithe as a panther, with a deliberateness of motion that made him appear slow, with eyes that varied from a soft blue to a steel gray, and a square chin and jaw that a ragged growth of beard could not hide. In spite of the dirt and the coarseness of his clothes, an air of refinement manifested itself in his bearing. Viewed from different angles, he might have been a prize-fighter, a dancing-master or a college football-player.

Teddy Watch knew his case was hopeless, yet despair formed no part of his emotions. He well knew that even his present quarters, unbearable as they seemed, were luxurious compared to the general pen, to which he would be consigned immediately when it was definitely known that his friends would not come to his assistance. He knew also that his conviction was certain. When arraigned before the judge, he had taken all blame upon himself and had freely and fully sworn Dutch Charlie and Pete Larsen, his engineer, out of court.

PETE and Dutch would have helped him, but without money and with the problem of existence staring them in the face, they were helpless. Other friends he had none; his boat, the *Juan de Dios* was in Mexican waters, and the *Kate and Ann,* when in the United States, had been confiscated. His personal effects—clothes, clean underwear and the like—were on the boat when she was seized. He knew they would never be seen by him again.

It was with a certain grim satisfaction that he exulted over the thought that they had found no money on him. He had not liked the firearms cargo. It appealed to his mind as bad business to be in trouble on both sides of the line, and in spite of repeated assurances by the agent that all he had to do was sail into port, show his manifest of macaroni and coffee and unload the cargo by the regular channels, he had felt misgivings; but he had been overpersuaded.

The cargo was valuable. Was it reasonable to suppose that he, Lugo, a reputable customs broker, was going to jeopardize ten thousand dollars' worth of rifles, to say nothing of his own reputation, unless he knew that it was all O. K.? And the only reason they were paying Watch two thousand dollars for the job was that it was necessary for the Captain to know what he carried; otherwise he would be sure to find it out and give the game away.

Well, he had fallen for this line of talk, but had insisted on being paid in advance. He had sent the money East to his old mother to pay the last installment on a life annuity for her. To complete the payment had drained him dry. Hence his grim smile of satisfaction, as he thought of the disappointment of the officials who had searched the boat and his effects. They could not believe he had no money. They had tried starving him a little to see if he would not dig up. The absence of even a blanket or any extra article of wearing apparel was, doubtless, due to the same desire. He knew that he might have to wait six months or even longer for his trial, and that no portion of this time would count in his favor when sentenced.

Still, Teddy Watch smiled. He was thinking of his mother and the comfortable annuity now assured. She should never know what it cost. Of the three brothers, he, the ne'er-do-well, was the only one to provide for her in her old age.

Suddenly the smile faded away. Teddy Watch swore. "I see it all now," he said. "The whole thing was a job. They wanted the rifles here. They wanted to put me out of business. I cut into their profits; I know too much. They wanted my boat. They wanted me. I am not safe. They want my life. I'll never get out of here alive. That's why they let Pete and Dutch go so easily. They wanted no possible witnesses. They'll make me try to escape, and then shoot me down. If I don't, then they'll murder me in my cell. What are they waiting for? I have it! The two thousand dollars! They expect to make me dig it up first. Well, that's the only trick I have taken so far. It looks as if it will be the last one."

IN a private dwelling near the Governor's house three men were seated around a table. A bottle, three partly emptied glasses and some handmade cigarettes apparently monopolized their attention. Lugo, but lately arrived from San Diego, puffed lazily, blowing the smoke upward in slowly ascending wreaths.

"Well, *Señor Capitán,*" he drawled, "what luck? Did everything come out as planned?"

The man addressed, at first sight, would never have been taken for a Spaniard. He was large and blond, with an oval face, red hair and flaming red mustachios fiercely curled. The eyes, black and close together, contrasted strangely with the huge adornment on his upper lip. The face, as nature and a life of dissipation made it, was repulsive; disfigured as it was by smallpox, it was positively hideous.

"Yes," he replied, "everything except the two thousand *pesos;* that money has not been recovered yet."

Lugo frowned slightly as though in annoyance at the delay.

"Well, you have him safely in your

blessed *cuartel.* Make him tell you where it is. He has it with him—in money. I paid him in cash on purpose, and he visited no bank, nor made any purchases before sailing. I waited till his cargo was aboard and he was ready for sea, and then followed him to the vessel. He stopped for a few minutes in an insurance office; that was all."

"Well, gentlemen," said the third at the table, "the Governor is much pleased at the result of our little *coup.* It will be the making of him to have been able to seize this shipment of arms and nip such a formidable uprising in the bud. He will get his appointment as general now."

"Yes, Don Carlos," answered Lugo, "and it should spell promotion also for our friend the Captain. It is a little rough on our other friends, the revolutionists, to have their good *dinero* squandered in this way, but all is fair in love and war."

"SPEAKING of love," said Carlos, "as the Governor's aid, I naturally take an interest in his daughter. Which one of you gentlemen is to marry the fair Inez?"

"I suggest," said Lugo, "that we throw dice for her, the loser to retire gracefully."

"Not now—perhaps to-morrow," replied Captain Antonio Perez patronizingly. "I rather fancy the odds are in my favor to-night, old man."

"I saw her look at that gringo you have in jail, the day your men were bringing him in, and if I were in your place, I would have been jealous, *Señor Capitán.*"

"Nonsense, Don Carlos—she never saw him before or since. She is naturally interested in my captives—being one herself; and besides, once we get the two thousand dollars Lugo is lamenting, that gringo will not remain long in our way."

"We'll have some rare picking from that coyote old Chink, with Captain Teddy Watch out of the business," said Lugo. "I understand he has a lot of monkeys ready for shipment now."

"Yes," answered the Captain, rising, "but don't think that Chinaman is smart. He is a fool compared to us, and he is mortally afraid of me. I have a man watching his every move, and I can scare him to death any minute. Stupid, I call him. We will not leave him enough profit to ever return to China."

As the men rose to leave the room, a phonograph horn, idly hanging above its instrument, seemed to move slightly in the wind. From a closet in an adjoining room a young woman quietly withdrew, taking with her a couple of feet of rubber tube, which she removed from a knothole in the partition. She carefully replaced a small pine-knot, which exactly fitted the hole in the wall; then, throwing a cheap *rebozo* over her head and shoulders, and first turning her skirt inside out, she took a bundle of laundry under her arm and walked leisurely down the street to the Chinese laundry where presided that guileless individual known as Wong Ching Fu. Walking carelessly along, she would not have attracted attention, for her bent back and twisted shoulders proclaimed her a worker—one of the poorer class. Easily eluding a drunken *paisano* who lurched in her direction, she scowled at him and lazily shuffled into the laundry.

WONG was standing at the counter which divided the front of the laundry from the rear. Without comment he made out the ticket which served as a receipt, using, in lieu of a pen, a short, soft paint-brush. If Wong felt any surprise as he opened the package and found nothing but some old gunnysacks, his face did not show it. He finished writing the ticket, which he handed to the young woman with as much indifference as though it were an everyday occurrence.

In a voice low but distinct, and as though casually inquiring about the weather, she asked: "Are you a friend of Captain Watch?"

Again, if Wong felt any surprise, his face betrayed him not. "Yes," he answered without looking up.

"Come to the kitchen of the Governor's house at eight o'clock; bring the washing with you."

"All lite," he replied as she turned to go. At the same time a drunken Mexi-

can staggered past the window. Down the street she sauntered, and by a roundabout way and with many aimless pauses, she finally reached the plaza where two disreputable-looking individuals sat on the sand, gazing disconsolately at the *Juan de Dios*. Lounging slowly past them, and without so much as a side-glance to note the effect, she dropped a couple of Mexican dollars at their feet. "Captain Watch wants you to be here to-morrow night at sundown and wait for orders," she said in passing.

"What is that?" cried Mr. Pete Larsen, springing to his feet and taking a step forward. "Tell me more."

She turned, angrily shaking her fist almost in his face. "Shut your mouth, you fool, and obey orders!" came to his ears in crisp, cutting tones.

Turning, she hurried away.

WONG CHING FU tapped lightly at the door of the Governor's kitchen at eight o'clock. It opened as if by magic, and a small, soft hand plucked Wong by the sleeve and gently led him into the darkness. Noiselessly he followed his invisible guide through several doors and passages. At length she paused and turned an electric switch. The room was large and luxuriously furnished. It bespoke the pitiful effort of a woman, shut off from the world, to make a world of her own.

Wong's guide was of medium height, and one glance revealed the luxurious beauty of the Latin race; and yet, after the second look, one did not feel like hazarding a guess as to her nationality.

She motioned Wong to an easy-chair, and drawing up a light one, seated herself close to him. "Wong," she said slowly and evenly, "I am Inez Victoria, the Governor's daughter. I came to you this afternoon to learn if you could be depended on, and because I need you. You can trust me not to lie to you." As though dismissing those matters as finally settled, she proceeded. "How many Chinamen have you to go across the line?"

To do Wong justice, it must be admitted that he blinked twice before answering: "Thirty."

"Thirty," she mused. "And how much do you get for your commission?"

"Fliftleen hundled dolla," replied Wong without a blink.

"How much would you pay Captain Watch to take them over?"

A shadow crossed Wong's wooden visage. "Cap, he in jail," he volunteered. It was half information and half interrogation.

"Yes, I know," she answered; "but how much would you pay him, if he were out?"

Wong was silent a long time. "You he fiend?" he droned finally with no apparent interest. Wong seemed to be going to sleep.

"Yes," she answered.

"Velly well," said Wong positively, looking her squarely in the eye, "I pay slix thousan' dolla in advlance an' be dam' glad."

"Wong, you're a dear," she said. "Will you help me get him out of jail?"

"What they do me, they flind out?" said Wong noncommittally.

"Kill you, Wong, dear," she answered cheerfully.

"All lite, I help. What they do Cap, he no lun away?"

"Kill him," said Inez with a little sob in her voice.

Wong regarded her contemplatively for the space of a full minute. Then he broke out: "Why you glad I get kill?" There was a pained note in his voice.

"Wong, I don't want to see you killed; I like you, but"—a soft blush suffused her face—"I love Captain Watch, and you are the only one that knows it."

"Cap, he no know?" interrogated Wong doubtingly.

"No, you old inquisitive," she laughed, "I haven't told *him* yet."

"Oh!" said Wong with deep disgust. "I help—you tell how."

CAPTAIN ANTONIO PEREZ stood in front of the broad entrance to the *cuartel* and twirled his mustachios and smiled a smile of deep complacency. In the inside pocket of the brave Captain's vest reposed a little

note, the subtle perfume of which still haunted his nostrils, as even now, for the hundredth time his mind repeated the contents.

"Honored Captain," it read, "be in front of the *cuartel* at dusk. I shall pass that way and desire a private and confidential word with you—I. V."

The note had been delivered earlier in the day by the Governor's Chinese boy, who had hurried away without waiting for an answer; and even now dusk was rapidly deepening into darkness.

"*Buenas noches, Señor Capitán*—are you dreaming pleasant dreams?" said a musical voice at his elbow; and he turned to see Inez, some yards in advance of the Chinese messenger, who stood at a respectful distance, carrying a basket.

"Yes, I was dreaming of you," he responded gallantly.

"Why waste your time in dreaming?" she softly inquired with an inflection that set his heart to thumping.

"In the absence of the reality, the dream is my only solace," he responded. "What service may I render you, as some slight recompense for the favor of your presence here?"

"It is I who have come to do you a service, Captain," she replied in a low voice. "You want to get the two thousand dollars that has been bothering Lugo so much, and I think I can make the gringo tell me where it is. If I succeed or fail, Lugo must never know. Promise me that you will respect my confidence, happen what may, until I myself release you! You see what it means to my reputation; I am in your hands, my dear Captain. Father would be wild if he knew what is in my mind; he has other plans, and it would spoil all for him to suspect too soon."

"I will protect you with my life," he smirked, scowling in the direction of the Chinese boy, who had advanced a step nearer. "But about the money—how do you hope to succeed?"

"Trust me, Captain dear, to wheedle anything I want out of a mere man. All I desire is an opportunity. Take me to him now. Lee has a good dinner in that basket. You stand guard at the end of the corridor to see that no discordant note breaks my spell, and I will get results that will surprise you. I'll make him think I am his friend. He will be more than human if he doesn't believe me. It will be better if the guards know nothing of our visit; you manage all that."

"You are a wonder," he answered. "I adore you! Pass this way in five minutes." And he turned into the entrance of the *cuartel.*

FIVE minutes later the door of the room in which Watch was confined was softly opened. A young woman entered, followed by an unobtrusive Chinese boy. The door was locked after them, and the valiant Captain clanked down the hallway and seated himself for a comfortable smoke within easy calling distance. For company he entertained various pleasing thoughts, among which conquest, riches and revenge struggled mildly for supremacy.

Could the precious Captain have seen, or even imagined what was going on so close to him, his complacency would have received a severe jolt. Hardly had his resounding footsteps started down the hall before Inez had lighted a small candle, and the now alert Chinese boy had thrown himself on the floor with his ear close to the door. With a start of surprise, Watch looked up—but what followed surprised him more. Holding the candle so its light fell full on her face, she looked him in the eye searchingly for one long moment; what she saw there must have satisfied her.

"I am your friend," she said simply. "You are in grave peril. Are you willing, on my advice, to risk your life in an attempt to escape?"

"Will it involve you also?" he asked slowly.

"I cannot be harmed if you obey orders," she replied.

In a second every sign of inactivity left him. "I am yours to command," he said with a snap of the jaw. From the basket she took a shaving outfit. "Lather your face," she said shortly, "for a quick shave." Twice sixty seconds had not elapsed before she was sponging his face with a yellowish stain. A blouse and loose pantaloons

were drawn over his clothes; a Chinese cap, with pigtails sewed to it, was fitted to his head, and cloth shoes were crammed on his feet.

A soft rope was produced from the basket, and the willing Chinese boy was securely tied, hand and foot. A gag was fastened in his mouth. Under instructions from Inez, he was gently deposited in a corner of the room. Stooping, she pinned a letter to his breast and ran her fingers over his smoothly shaved head, feeling of a large swelling there with evident satisfaction.

"Poor Lee," she murmured to herself, "you don't know how lucky you were when that piece of wood you were chopping this morning flew up and hit you. I quite fancy it will add local color to your story. Good-by, Lee," she whispered in his ear. "Remember, you saw a flash of light and knew nothing more."

INEZ slipped a revolver into Watch's hand, closed the basket and handed it to him, whispered a few brief instructions and knocked on the door. The first knock brought the Captain, and as he partly opened the door, he was fairly intoxicated by the radiant light in her eyes as she crowded by him into the narrow opening, carrying the candle high above her face. In the dim light he distinguished the Chinese boy with the basket, as with one hand she half dragged him after her. Then the candle dropped from her hand, and all was total darkness. He felt her body brush softly past him, and felt the Chink shrink silently away from the opening.

"Quick, lock the door!" she whispered. "I will feel better when it is safely locked." The Captain pulled the door shut and dropped the iron bar into place. "There is no danger," he laughed. "I only wish he would try to escape."

"Oh! Not while I am here!" she gasped. "I could not bear to see you kill him."

"You did not remain long, sweetheart; what luck?" he asked jauntily as they approached the dimly lighted corridor.

"Sweetheart!" she cried. "You pig! you swine! To use that word to me before you have Father's consent and mine!" Her words flowed in a torrent of rage.

"Just because I have shown you how much a woman can care, you dare to become familiar with me. You go to Father in the morning and ask him for my hand, and until you come to me with his answer, not one word more. Here is your dirty check that I lowered myself to get for you," she cried, thrusting a paper into his hands. "I alone guessed where the money was. The ink is not yet dry on the signature before I am insulted for my trouble."

"A million pardons, Miss Victoria," he begged. "I will do humble penance for offending you." This self-sufficient worthy was amazed and dumfounded by her sudden onslaught.

"Come, Lee," she said, and without a glance at the Captain, she swept haughtily out. The Chinese boy shuffled noiselessly after her. At the entrance she paused, and just as Lee slid past her into the darkness, she turned a roguish glance full into the dazed Captain's face. "Thank me for your prize to-morrow, after you have seen Father," she said, laughing lightly as she waved an airy adieu.

THE Captain turned nearer to the light and scrutinized the paper. It was a draft on a well-known firm in the States; it read: "Pay to the bearer the sum of two thousand dollars and charge same to my account. Theodore Watch."

The ink on the draft was old; the signature was fresh.

"She is a wonder," sighed the Captain as he folded the paper carefully and deposited it next to his heart in company with a certain perfumed missive. "But I'll teach her a thing or two soon. I guess I'll go show this paper to Watch. He may like to know where his money is going."

So soliloquizing, he loosened his revolver in its holster and strutted pompously down the hallway. Calling four of the guards with lanterns,—for he had a wholesome respect for the prowess of Captain Teddy Watch,—he stamped down the corridor and noisily opened the door; his men were at his

heels to witness the discomfiture of the prisoner and to bear testimony to his own acumen. He entered the room. Then *Señor Capitán* Don Antonio Perez rubbed his eyes to see if he were dreaming. All that met his astonished gaze was a very miserable-looking and well-secured bundle, which on closer inspection proved to be the Governor's Chinese boy Lee, just returning to consciousness, but so well gagged that he could not have uttered a sound. The Captain ran a practiced hand over Lee's head, and a gleam of intelligence flashed from his sinister eyes as his fingers encountered a large lump. The next moment the letter pinned to the boy's coat attracted his attention, and leaving his men to release poor Lee, he withdrew to his lighted office to read it.

The note was in the dainty chirography he had learned to know so well, and it read:

"Honored Captain:

"You will never know how it pains me not to be able to be present and witness with my own eyes the varying emotions with which you read this—my feeble tribute to your perspicacity, your unfailing politeness and your innate modesty. Lest you might, in the befuddled recesses of your alcohol-soaked brain, imagine that you have been scurvily dealt with, permit me to call to your memory that my former letter was merely a request for a private and confidential word with you.

"Now for the service which was promised you—and may the saints bear witness that it is a service and the part of real friendship to hold up the mirror of truth in order that you may see yourself in your proper light, correct your faults and overcome your weaknesses. I could not willingly hurt the meanest of God's creatures, even for its own good, but if He who created the rattlesnake—doubtless for some beneficent purpose—had likewise a hand in creating you, it must have been for some end which my finite mind cannot comprehend. Rather would I believe that you were created by the devil and came straight from hell.

"From childhood I have followed your vile life, wondering how such things could be. I know of the murders—and worse—that you have committed. I myself overheard your plots to assassinate your late prisoner, and I know the secret plans you laid to kill him by slow degrees. I heard you discuss your proposed marriage with me, and believe me, I felt flattered that you had so good an opinion of my judgment. God forbid that there should exist a woman so low as to make a fitting mate for you.

"Your appreciative

"INEZ VICTORIA.

"P. S. The check I gave you is bogus."

WHEN the Captain had finished the letter, he was livid with rage. It did not appear possible for him to tear himself away from its perusal. As long as he read, it seemed like some horrid nightmare from which he might awaken, but as he finished, his senses returned, and with an oath he called for the bugler and sprang to the signal-gun which gave the alarm for an escaping prisoner.

In a moment he was giving orders to his hastily assembled staff: "Surround the laundry; bring Wong here at once. Man the custom-house boats. Put ten men on the *Juan de Dios*. Patrol the beach. Send mounted men down all the roads and trails. Search every house in town. Rouse the Governor—tell him to hold his daughter till I come." Seizing a rifle, the Captain started for the beach. Whatever else Captain Antonio Perez may have been, inaction was not one of his shortcomings. As he neared the beach, he met one of his aids running.

"The custom-house boats are gone," he cried.

"Seize every skiff," he shouted, and even as he spoke, the riding light on the *Juan de Dios* went out. The Captain started on a run toward the beach. "Send every man to the beach!" he cried. "Open fire on the *Juan de Dios!* Fire, I say, fire!" As he arrived, puffing and out of breath, the soldiers began to shoot.

ONCE outside the narrow circle of light, Inez seized Watch by the hand, and both raced to the shore. All

unconscious of what was taking place in the *cuartel,* they reached the beach, and two reclining figures awaited them on the sand.

"Pete! Dutch!" ejaculated Watch with satisfaction.

From the basket a revolver was handed to each of them.

"Quick! To the little custom-house boat!" cried Inez.

The small boat and the large one were in the water. By the latter stood thirty Chinese, headed by one stolid old stoic with a wooden face. Without a word they all tumbled into the large boat and paddled into the darkness after the other. The smaller craft moved swiftly and silently in the direction of the riding light of the *Juan de Dios.*

"Our only hope is to set foot on board without being seen," said Ted.

Even as Ted spoke, the man on watch walked over and sat down on the low deck-house under the light and looked in their direction. In a second Inez broke out into song.

"Splash with your oars," she whispered. "Row closer."

"Who goes there!" called the watch.

"Friends," she laughed between snatches of a rollicking love-song. "We want to come on board," she called.

"Give the countersign, and you may," answered the man on guard.

"The only countersign we have," laughed Inez, "is three pretty girls and three bottles of wine."

"You don't want to go on board," expostulated Watch in excellent Spanish.

"Yes, she does," called the officer in charge, sticking his head up out of the cabin companion-way. "Come on board, girls, and sing us another song at close range."

"We accept, kind sir," called Inez. "Get up off the bottom of the boat, Carmen," she called to an imaginary companion. Changing her voice, she shrieked back as though in a gale of laughter: "If you want me on board, you'll have to carry me."

THE boat drifted under the stern, well into the shadow, and Inez scrambled over the rail, falling as she did so. The officer stooped to help her, coming well within the shadow of the deck-house. A sharp crack on the head from the butt of Watch's revolver felled him like an ox. With hardly a second glance Teddy lounged forward. He was followed by Inez, singing and calling on her companions to follow up into the light. Larsen was at her heels, while Dutch occupied himself by sitting comfortably on the officer, meanwhile deftly disarming and binding him.

As Ted, Inez and Pete arrived on the fore-deck, a signal gun boomed from the *cuartel,* followed by a blare of trumpets sounding the assembly call. As all eyes turned shoreward, two dull thuds announced the lapse into unconsciousness of the remainder of the guard. As Watch and Larsen quickly secured them, Inez called to the larger boat, which lost no time in ranging alongside. In the meantime the clamor on shore had increased to the proportions of a riot.

"Get your mill going, Pete," ordered Watch, as he leaped to extinguish the anchor-light.

"Here, Dutch," he called, "unstopper the chain. I am going to try to take the anchor with me. We may need it, but I want it ready to slip if we get short of time."

He dashed forward to the windlass, calling to Wong to follow, and between them they soon had four Chinese pumping furiously on the long handles, and the chain came slowly in.

"Chain unstoppered, sir," reported Dutch, emerging from the forepeak.

"Stand by to throw the wildcat in case I decide to slip! Wong, count your men!" Watch gave these orders in quick succession as he ran aft to see that the painters of the two boats were properly secured, and to inspect the prisoners. This finished, he ran to the engine-room hatch.

"Anything wrong, Pete?" he called.

For answer the engine gave a cough and a snort and settled down to a steady clank.

THE sound of the exhaust was the signal for a scattering volley from the shore, and the growing commotion indicated that boats were being

launched and manned. As Watch ran forward to slip the anchor, he was met by Dutch coming aft.

"All adrift, sir," he reported.

"Get your anchor aboard," said Watch as he stepped into the little pilot-house and gave the signal to go ahead.

As the *Juan de Dios* gathered way, and the sound of rowlocks became faint in the distance, a sudden sickening fear came over Captain Teddy Watch. He rang a slow bell just as Dutch appeared to report the anchor catted. "Keep her west by north," he said as he went in search of Inez.

He found her holding a bottle of smelling-salts to the nostrils of the stunned officer, having already cooled his head with cold salt water. He was just opening his eyes.

"Let us look at the men," she said as soon as she saw that her services were no longer needed. Acceding to her wish, Ted led the way forward, where they found both of the men little worse for their sudden raps on the head. "I must put these men in the boats and cast them off in the bay, where they can easily reach shore," he said. "But before doing so, I want to be advised of your wishes in regard to yourself. You have saved my life," he continued, "and no one knows better than I that without your aid my case was hopeless. I shudder to think of the risks you have taken on my account."

She laughed—a little, mirthless laugh. "I have burned my bridges behind me," she said. "Let us get rid of the prisoners and put to sea; I do not feel safe here."

"I am under your orders," said Watch. He hastened to the pilot-house, rang one bell to stop, and with Dutch's help, deposited the two men, both securely bound, in the small boat. Untying the officer, Watch assisted him into the boat, and tying the painters together, cast them off.

"My compliments to Captain Perez," he called as the boats drifted away in the darkness. "One bell," he ordered. Dutch resumed his place in the pilot-house.

"Pardon me a few moments," he said to Inez. "I must see that everything is all right; I shall not feel safe, either, until we are well clear."

WATCH'S first solicitude was for the engine-room. Dropping down the hatch, he inquired of Pete how he had found things.

"All O. K., sir," was the cheery reply. "Plenty of oil—plenty of fuel. Everything just as we left it. The mill is running fine."

"Good," said Watch, a big load off his mind. His next inspection was the water-tank; it was almost full. Leading Wong forward, he showed him how to stow his men in the hold.

As they passed the little islands that lay at the entrance to the bay, Ted laid a course well out to sea, and relaxing his vigilance somewhat, seated himself beside Inez.

The steady hum of the engine had in it a soothing note. The swirl of the water along the side sang its song of peace and quiet. The lights of the town had disappeared astern, while ahead the blackness of the night offered complete safety from pursuit. As they sat thus, in silence, a feeling of sadness and of depression crept over Inez. Her whole life passed in review before her. She saw her mother, who had died when Inez was six. She saw her father—hard, cold and implacable. Her desires were gratified by him as the easiest method of getting rid of her, but the cost came out of the property left to her by her mother, a property which, she had only lately been informed, was practically exhausted. She saw her life at Vassar in all its humdrum routine; and then the one bright spot—her visit with her friend Edith Marsden, and the trip with the family to see the big football game between Yale and Harvard, in which Edith's brother, with two ribs broken, covered his college and himself with glory by winning a hopelessly lost game. How well she remembered the conventional phrases that set her heart to beating when she was presented to this popular hero by his own proud mother. It was love at first sight with her.

Then followed the long, lonesome years of study in Paris, with but one object in view—to make herself perfect

for the man who some day would ask her to be his wife. What matter if she had only seen him once for five minutes, and that then he had scarcely noticed the retiring little girl in short skirts? Providence intended them for each other—she was sure of it.

Edith's letters had come more and more infrequently, and then had ceased altogether. Then had come that glad day when she could return home. How she had planned every detail of her visit to Edith and the conquest that was sure to follow! Then the shock of learning of her death, and that her brother, getting into serious trouble with the law, had deserted his mother, then a widow, and was a fugitive from justice.

Then came the last few years with no future and no present. Try as she would, she knew that she still loved the one and only man around whose image she had created an ideal in her heart. And then he had appeared, not in her dreams, but in the flesh, walking down the street, surrounded by Mexican soldiers, on his way to the *cuartel.* What matter his shortcomings? What matter those weary years? He was in trouble. The greater her sacrifice to save him, the greater her joy. And now she was seated beside him,—Ted Marsden,—her work done, but realizing that whatever her life might be, she could never give herself to a man who was unworthy. The moon rose slowly from behind the land. It climbed into the heavens, covering the surface of the sea with a shimmering silvery light.

TED finally turned slowly to Inez and slowly commenced to speak.

"There are times," he said, "when minutes mean more than years. I have known you a short three hours, and yet during that brief time our relations have been such that I would feel myself less a man did I not lay bare my soul to you. It seems to me as though I had known you always. I cannot realize that we have not met before. Hear me through before passing judgment. You are in trouble on my account, and whatever may pass between us in the future, you may depend on me as long as my life lasts; you should know that without being told, but that is not the matter of which I wished to talk. Have I your permission to go on?"

"Yes," she said evenly and coldly.

"I love you," he said after a long pause. "I know it is almost an insult from a man in my position. I have nothing to offer but a lifetime of devotion; that will not wear out with time. But there is not one single act of my life that I cannot tell you without blushing. As for yourself, I ask no questions. If you are not a good woman, one never lived. But if you were not, you are the only woman in the world for me. Even though hopeless, I must tell you this. It is my duty—it is your right to know. Give me the chance; in a year's time you will learn to care for me." Inez was silent a long time. Watch gazed dejectedly across the water.

Suddenly she burst into a peal of musical laughter. Ted looked up—amazed, hurt. "Ted," she said, and her full, even tones, wonderfully caressing, made his heart stand still, "we are both fools. This is the silliest courtship that ever happened. I have loved you for years and years. Kiss me—and then we'll both explain!"

HOURS later, Inez was sleeping quietly in the little cabin of the *Juan de Dios,* carefully prepared for her by Ted, now standing his trick at the wheel. Pete was catching a little sleep while Dutch watched the engine. Day was beginning to break, and they were well on their way. It was Ted's plan to keep so far outside of San Clemente as to run no risk of being sighted by a chance vessel. Rounding its western extremity, he would head for the upper end of Catalina, from which, in the darkness of the night, he was within striking distance of the entire coast, from Santa Monica to Newport.

Toward noon Ted had slowed the engine in order to keep from arriving too soon, and at four o'clock he rounded well outside the big rock at the western end of San Clemente, without having sighted a vessel of any description. He had laid his course for the upper end of Catalina, and was rolling along a

little uncomfortably at three-quarters speed, with the northwest swell almost abeam. Inez was with him in the pilothouse, learning to steer.

They had left the Island about three miles behind when Ted, who cast frequent glances astern, saw a large gasoline craft coming out of Northwest Harbor. She was picking her way through the kelp, and as she turned broadside to, Ted recognized the *Occident,* the speediest boat in the Government service. One glance told the story. She had been waiting there snugly for just what had happened, and he had gone thirty miles out of his way to give her the chance she coveted.

"Pete," he said, "the *Occident* is after us. We'll have three miles and a half lead by the time she gets clear of the kelp. We must beat her until dark. If we are a mile ahead at dark, I can lose her. If anything gets hot, we are lost. Shoot the oil into her plenty, and get all you can safely. Send Dutch up to me as soon as everything runs to suit you."

The engine was already running at top speed, but under Pete's practiced hand, a little less throttle and a little less advanced spark took off much of the vibration and scarcely diminished the speed. Ted was easing her along with the wheel, using every point he knew, when Dutch reported at the pilothouse. "Steer your prettiest," said Watch as, motioning to Inez to follow, he led the way aft.

Then ensued an anxious ten minutes. "He is closing in on us," said Ted at last. At the end of twenty minutes more his face wore a troubled look. "I've figured every way, and I don't see how we can keep clear until dark. I hesitate to put our last ounce of power until the last minute, because we may burn up a bearing, and I keep hoping something will happen to him. The little we could gain would not keep us clear till dark. This means ten years in the pen' for me, sweetheart, if that fellow catches me red-handed. If we only had two miles more start, I believe I could make it."

SLOWLY he walked to the engine-room. Pete stuck his head out of the hatch to get a breath of air. His face was covered with oil and perspiration.

"We are losing out, Pete; give her the last notch you can. I'll send Dutch down to pour water on the thrust."

"She's making four hundred and sixty-five, sir," said Pete. "Maybe I can squeeze her up another ten, but it's dangerous."

Ted cast one more lingering glance astern; then, with a dry twinkle in his eye, he said: "It's dangerous not to." He went forward to the wheel and sent Dutch below. For fifteen minutes he kept his face resolutely ahead. The pounding of the engine was not reassuring. His practiced ear told him that they were asking too much of iron and brass. Any second might bring disaster. They were scarcely two miles and a half ahead. Giving the wheel to Inez, he ran aft and called to Pete. "Slow her down till it's safe," he ordered. "We can't hold her, anyhow, and we'll have a longer lease of life a little slower."

"She is warming up," said Pete. "She would not stand that gait ten minutes more."

"Work hard till you get her cool again," said Ted, and then he hurried forward to the wheel. "Inez, can you endure what is going to happen to us?" he asked with a set face.

"Yes," she answered, "but have we no hope at all? Might they not break down?"

"No chance except one. That I am going to take, and it is almost certain to prove disastrous. They will catch us before dark."

SHORTLY after six o'clock Pete came on deck for a moment, and the sight that met his eyes startled him. There were yet two good hours of daylight. The *Occident* was a short mile astern. It needed but a glance to show him that she would be within rifle-shot in half an hour or less. Why had she not already got to work with her rapid-fire gun? As he looked forward, he saw the answer. There was no need to, for instead of heading for the end of the Island, they were steering straight into Catalina harbor, and even at that moment were entering this *cul-de-sac,* from which there was no possible es-

cape. Was Watch crazy? He could not believe that his cool-headed commander could display so little sense. Once in the harbor, they were lost. Even now it was too late to turn. Watch came running aft, spoke a few sharp, deliberate words—and Pete hurried below, sending Dutch on deck. Wong was called into consultation in the pilot-house, and then he hurriedly went below.

Watch took the wheel again, and as he did so, he leaned over and kissed Inez. Their eyes met in one brief glance, with a world of mutual confidence there. Ted rang again for full speed ahead, and again the tortured engine throbbed in distress at the unnatural task it was called upon to perform. They were entering the narrow harbor, their relentless pursuer not six minutes behind. Down they dashed into the narrowest part of the harbor, where for a few brief minutes they would be out of sight. On into the shallow water he drove her, full speed ahead. "Stand by," he rang, and Pete, braced for the shock, stood to his clutch. "Reverse," he signaled, and Pete, throwing her over, was just in time to kill most of the jar as she ran hard and fast aground.

THEN a queer thing happened. Seizing a hatchet, Pete hacked a hole in the gasoline tank. Jumping on deck, he struck a match, lighted a piece of waste, and throwing it into the gasoline-drenched engine-room, ran forward at top speed. Ted was already halfway to the shore, wading in the shallow water, Inez perched high and dry on his shoulder. Dutch was at his heels, while thirty-one Chinamen were splashing along in a mad race for the land. Arriving on shore, Inez and Ted joined hands, and followed by the entire band, started on a jog-trot across the narrow isthmus.

Ted set such a pace as his judgment told him the rest could follow for the entire distance. As they approached the clear ground on the other side, he cast a glance backward. The *Occident* was coming around the point and heading straight for the burning boat. In his hasty glance he noted with satisfaction that she was even then slowing down. Drawing at least two feet more water than the *Juan de Dios,* Ted knew that even if they recovered promptly from their surprise, at least a couple of extra minutes would be consumed by reason of his pursuers being unprepared for his sudden change of base.

He was delighted to find Inez fleet and sure of foot, and cautioning the others to maintain their gait, he dashed on ahead, turning, as he entered the little settlement, to the only building which had wires leading to it. "May I use your phone?" he asked breathlessly as he approached the open door. Receiving an affirmative reply from the woman addressed, he entered hastily and removed the receiver from the hook. The instant he was unobserved, a screw-driver from his pocket was jabbed violently into both the receiver and transmitter, putting the instrument out of commission with hardly a visible mark to indicate its condition. Waiting no longer, he hurriedly withdrew, joining the motley band which was even at that moment racing past toward the beach.

As they turned the corner and came in view of the wharf, Ted gave utterance to an ejaculation of delight, for there in plain sight was a fishing-launch of about five tons, her engine idly chugging away and her people scattered along the beach. As they trotted out onto the pier, at a word from Ted, Pete, Dutch and Inez slipped handkerchiefs over their faces in the manner of highwaymen. Doing the same himself, Ted dropped into the boat, and whipping out his revolver, covered the astonished boatman while his odd-looking followers clambered aboard. Pete was at the engine in a moment, and as the erstwhile commander was unceremoniously assisted to the ladder, Dutch cut the mooring-lines, and the little packet moved out from the wharf.

Five minutes later he had the pleasure of seeing his pursuers come into sight, knowing that there was no boat to follow him, and that they could not get in telephone communication with Avalon to wire to the mainland. By the time the *Occident* could come around the Island, or a messenger be sent overland,

he would be landed. But even here he was surrounded by difficulties. The pursuit would be swift and relentless. Once again boldness and foolhardiness seemed to promise the best prospect of success, and with the audacity which in emergency had often stood him in such good stead, he planned to run right through San Pedro harbor into the Wilmington slough, confident that the last place the officers would search would be directly under their own noses.

Two hours and a half later, Ted and Inez were aboard an electric car bound for Los Angeles, while thirty happy Chinamen, under direction of one very astute Oriental, were scattering like quail. The *Occident,* having laboriously rounded the Island, was well on her way to Portuguese Bend, and a tired messenger was seated in the wireless station at Avalon, sending orders galore to patrol the coast. Pete and Dutch, having run the little launch well up a slough where she would be safely found in a week or two, dropped in to see a trusted friend who would furnish safe refuge until some deep-water ship wanted a couple of sailors.

WHEN the eastbound limited left Los Angeles that night, one of the drawing-rooms was occupied by a strikingly handsome girl, apparently traveling alone. In a lower berth in the partly filled car, a well-tanned, athletic-looking young man was leisurely stowing away his scanty baggage. Next morning they met quite joyfully at breakfast, as friends meet unexpectedly when both are starting on a monotonous journey. Later in the day Ted and Inez, cozily seated in the half-empty Pullman, were busily engaged in thinking of the future. Ted broke the silence.

"Inez," he said, "we were right to go while the going was good. About day after to-morrow, they may be watching every train."

"So soon," she laughed. "Where will we be then?"

"You will be in Chicago. I will be in Denver."

Her face grew serious. Noting her look, he continued: "You will be with Mother that same day. She will be overjoyed to see you, and when she learns that we are to be married, it will make her ten years younger. You will again know what it is to have a real mother. You can't help loving her, and she will idolize you."

"And when may I expect the pleasure of seeing you again?" she inquired demurely—almost sadly.

He hastened to reassure her. "Just the moment, dear, that I am established in some honest position that will enable me to support a wife. It wont be long, sweetheart, I promise you; I'll work early and late."

The air of sadness vanished as if by magic. "Do you really and truly love me?" she purred.

"Do I?" he repeated. "Don't I?"

"Are you sure it will last?" she insisted.

"Forever!" And his voice sounded his pain at her question. "Does your love let you doubt me? I could never doubt you."

"I do not doubt you, you goose; I merely wanted to be reassured for a special reason." Her eyes narrowed. "Now listen carefully, Ted Marsden, to what you are going to do. You are going to hang around the house for two weeks, making a general nuisance of yourself, and then you are going to be married.

"I was willing to break into jail for you. I was willing to run off to sea with you, before I knew you cared. I was willing to travel across the continent with a suit-case containing nothing but some hairpins and a toothbrush, and all because these things seemed vitally necessary for me to do. But I will not unnecessarily extract misery from life for both of us when there is nothing to be gained. Never fear but we will get along, once we are safely married. I shall enjoy doing my share. Take my word for it, Ted; I am a famous manager. I can cook and sew, and however little money you bring me, we will save at least half. We are going to get along splendidly.

"This is the last time I ever want my way, Ted," she coaxed; "say yes—just this once."

"Yes, this once and always!" he answered.

The Molder Moldeth

by Daniel Ward

MARTIN JONES stood at the door of the dance-hall and looked in. He was a stocky man of thirty with a broad, red face into which was set a pair of straight-gazing blue eyes. The eyelids were constantly narrowed, because Martin Jones, being a molder by trade, had spent a third of his life gazing at hot metal. He was dressed in a black suit, hard-bosomed white shirt, white collar, black tie, and highly polished tan shoes. He held a big straw hat in his right hand.

Martin Jones stood alone at the edge of mirth, for anyone could have seen that he would have been out of place as a sharer in that mirth. Inside the hall young couples wove in and out in the intricacies of the latest dances. In his early twenties Martin had tried to learn to dance, but he could not keep his clumsy feet to the music and he had no grace. He had given up the attempt, and, thus socially removed, had become a lonely man. He did not grow bitter, because, heart, mind and body, he was sound. But he could be envious without being bitter, and on this midsummer night he was almost unendurably envious. He would have given his good right hand, much as he needed that, if he could have danced as well as, say, Tom Paterson. Tom Paterson was the best male dancer among those devotees of the terpsichorean art. He was a slender, brown-haired, brown-eyed youth whom nature had endowed with grace instead of the strength which she had given to Martin. Tom was a bookkeeper in the office of the mill in which Martin was a molder.

Tom Paterson could master the most difficult steps in less time than anyone else. He could make an awkward dancer think she had suddenly acquired skill. Hence he was extremely popular with the mill-town girls and could pick and choose. In addition to being a good dancer a girl had to be very pretty before Tom presented himself at her front door and asked if she were ready. The girls were always ready, for Tom did not like to be kept waiting.

NEVER before had Martin Jones been envious of Tom, but to-night he was envious. He wondered, for the first time, why Tom had been blessed by nature as he was superbly blessed, while Martin had been fashioned as nature fashioned her louts. For swinging about the floor, just at this moment, as she had swung a dozen times before that night in Tom's arms, was a girl with shining yellow hair.

This girl with the shining yellow hair had attracted Martin to the dance. He knew that he could only gaze upon her, but so to gaze was a great deal if he could have no more.

The feeling which was stirring Martin had come to him tempestuously, as it often comes to placid, retiring men. He had seen her for the first time only two days before, on his way home from work on the night-shift in the mill. He carried a dinner-bucket and had a towel wrapped around his throat. The girl had come tripping down the street, daintily garbed, bright-faced, her yellow hair shining from beneath her hat. Martin had seen her from afar, and unconsciously he had pulled the towel more closely about his throat. For some strange reason, he had felt that he must seem a ridiculously rough figure in her eyes—if she saw him at all.

He was staring at her as she neared him, but his eyes dropped when he perceived that she was looking straight into them. When she was within two feet of him, she stopped.

"Can you tell me where the mill-office is?" she asked.

"It's right there in that frame building just beside the overhead bridge," Martin answered, pointing. "You looking for somebody there, ma'am?"

"Oh, I'm going to work there," the girl said.

"Well, that's the place," Martin said, pointing again.

"Thank you," she smiled.

AS Martin continued his homeward journey, he had all he could do to resist the temptation to turn and stare after the girl. He was dazzled by such daintiness, charmed by a voice so soft and sweet.

"Such a nice, pretty little thing," he told himself.

But he did not turn. If he had done so, he would have got another glimpse of her face, for she turned to look after him before she reached the steps leading up to the mill-office. Apparently the girl was not particularly shy. If she found a man worth looking at, she looked at him. Why not?

"My, he must be strong," was her mental comment.

She tripped up the steps, asked for the particular officer for whom she was going to make pothooks and took off her gay little hat when she found him. He gave her a seat by a window, so that she would have plenty of light on the keys of her typewriter and on her notebooks. She had taken a dozen letters and was diligently and skillfully tapping them out on the typewriter when Tom Paterson entered the office.

Tom was considerably late, as usual. His employer flashed a rebuking look at him which Tom did not see. He saw only the girl, and he believed he "had seen her first." There was an unwritten law in the mill-town that the man who thus saw a girl had priority of privilege to pay her attention. The girl raised her eyes, and they met Tom's. The girl failed to blush. Tom, unlike Martin, was a type she had come to know very well.

In the middle of the forenoon Tom winked at her over his ledger. At noon, the boss having gone out, he walked over to her desk without hesitation.

"Might as well get acquainted," he said. "My name's Tom Paterson."

"Might as well," the girl agreed. "Mine's Milly Goodnow."

"I'll bet you dance," he said.

"Why, how did you guess it?" she asked in mock astonishment.

Tom smiled. She was pretty, she could dance, and she didn't snap a fellow up when he approached her. A rare and agreeable combination, that.

"There's a dance Thursday night at Macklin's Hall," Tom said. "How about you and me going together?"

"Very well," said Milly.

"Tell me where you live and I'll be at your house at a quarter to eight," he said.

She told him, and he was there promptly. He bore her in triumph to the dance, while poor Martin Jones trudged thither alone.

MILLY was the immediate sensation of the dance. She was as skillful a dancer as Tom Paterson himself. In her plain white dress, with her straw-colored hair swept back from her flushed face and her deep eyes shining with unalloyed pleasure in this poetry

of motion, she was easily the prettiest girl in that hall.

Martin was still standing at the door when Milly and Tom passed out after the dance was done. Tom was excited by his triumphant exhibition of his new girl. His face was flushed and his eyes were brilliant.

"Hello, old sport," he greeted Martin, his hand on Milly's elbow.

"Howdy," said Martin, his hungry eyes on Milly's face.

Milly looked at him. Unaccountably, she blushed, cheek and forehead.

"Good evening," she said.

"Good evening," Martin rejoined, steadily.

"Do you know that big bonehead?" Tom asked in the street, when he was sure he was safely out of Martin's hearing.

"I've met him," Milly answered.

"Where?" Tom demanded.

Milly tossed her head. After to-night she would not lack squires to the dances she loved, and she knew it. Tom was rather sudden with his air of proprietorship.

"I don't have to tell you everything, do I?" she asked.

"Certainly not," said Tom sulkily. "But, say, you're wasting your time on that guy. He's so far back in the parade that if he could sing, he'd still be singing 'After the Ball.'"

Milly did not reply to that. Tom studied the cheek nearest him as he walked close to her. But the cheek had become cool again. Milly's long lashes hid her lovely eyes, so that he could not see the thoughtful look which those eyes held.

At her front door Tom tried to make engagements with her for six successive nights. His plan was always to rush a new girl off her feet. He liked to be seen with her constantly in the dance-halls and picture-shows and ice-cream parlors. That always gave rise to speculation, and Tom liked to have people speculating about him. It was his kind of lime-light. He knew, also, that he would soon tire of Milly, as he had tired of every girl he had known, sooner or later. But Milly was strange. She refused his request. She said he might call two nights later.

WHEN Tom called, two nights after the dance, he tried again to get a monopoly on Milly's evenings. He failed. Milly herself did not know just why he failed. She liked what she called a good time, and Tom would serve as well as another to show her that. If the shadowy background held Martin Jones, she was not fully aware of it, though she found herself thinking of him, wondering about him, a good deal.

"If you wont see me to-morrow night, I'll go get another girl," Tom threatened.

"Do it, and see if I care," Milly retorted.

Tom did. He took another girl to a dance in Macklin's Hall. Going in, he came face to face with Martin Jones, coming out. Martin stared at the girl. Neither she nor Tom noticed the stare.

Martin had watched the progress of the affair between Milly and Tom. He had expected that Tom would play the game as he always played it, and his expectation was here fulfilled.

He walked the streets for an hour, thinking deeply. He was not a rapid thinker. He was not one who leaped to conclusions. He had to reason things out. He was sure just what he wanted to do now, but he was not sure of the wisest way to do it.

Martin Jones knew Tom Paterson. He knew Tom's ways. He had heard stories and he had first-hand knowledge. He knew that Paterson had hurt numberless girls by engaging their affections for a brief time and then dropping them. One girl had left her home in the mill-town and had not come back. Martin was determined that Tom Paterson should not thus treat Milly Goodnow. If he made a pledge to her, he should keep it, or Martin would know the reason why he didn't.

"I'll just stay on the job," he told himself now. "I wont let him out of my sight."

Thus the molder set out to mold the destinies of Tom Paterson.

FOR a week Martin kept track of Tom's comings and goings. He was a little bewildered by what he saw. On

the first two nights Tom was accompanied by different girls, neither of them Milly. On the third night Milly went to a dance at Macklin's with him. One night Tom remained at home. Then there were two more nights when he was with still different girls. Sunday evening he spent at Milly's home.

Martin could not understand why Tom did not rush Milly as he had always rushed other girls. He would have expected Tom to be faithless once or twice during this process, but Tom seemed to be paying little more attention to Milly than he did to another. To Martin this was inconceivable. He was somewhat befogged because he had come to be desperately in love with Milly himself.

On that Sunday evening Martin determined to have it out with Tom. He would discover at first-hand just what the situation was. So he waited in the shadow of a tree near Tom's front gate and stepped out when Tom came along. Tom stopped.

"Well," Tom said, "I thought maybe you were a hold-up man."

"Maybe I am," said Martin savagely. "Anyway, I'm going to hold you up till I've had a word with you."

Tom was in no mood to be bullied. He feared Martin Jones, but just now a sullen anger that was burning in him killed the fear. He had asked Milly that evening to go to a picture-show with him the next night, and she had coolly declined. Her coolness was maddening to Tom. He had never been coolly treated before. There was another thing: all his intimates were aware that he was failing with Milly, the prettiest girl he had elected to honor in a long time. They had not been slow with knife-thrusts of ridicule. Tom Paterson was deeply wounded in his pride.

"Hop to it," he told Martin now. "What's eating you?"

MARTIN put a big hand on Tom's arm and fingers which were as strong as steel tightened there till Tom winced.

"You know me, Tom Paterson," Martin whispered thickly. "You know I never hang a bluff. You know I'm on the dead level. And you know, too, that I know what you are. You're the lowest kind of man that walks. You get a girl all bound up in you and then you cast her off like she was a smoked-out cigar. But you listen to me now: That business don't go between you and Miss Goodnow. You're going to play the game square this trip—for the first time in your life. You're going to cut out the other girls. You're going to see Miss Goodnow every night you go to see anybody. You're going to be good to her. If you hurt her,—if you make her cry like you've made other girls cry,—you'll have to answer to me. And if you hurt her so bad that she runs away so she wont be made fun of, so help me God, I'll kill you. Get me?"

"You're talking through your hat, Martin," Tom said, his face white. "I've tried to see Milly oftener than I have, but she wont see me. I only wanted to show her a good time."

"You liar!" Martin cried.

He believed in that moment that all he had feared, all he had suspected, about Tom's designs on the woman he loved was true. He saw Tom cringe away from the blazing fury in his face and he took that for silent confession. He suddenly jerked the arm he held and brought Tom to his knees. His mighty fist was raised to smite the chalklike face lifted to his.

"You're lying and you know it," he cried. "Say you're lying."

A vision of death from that awful clenched fist came to Tom Paterson, a weak man physically. In that instant he would have confessed to anything. He wanted only to escape from Martin's terrible anger.

"Yes, I'm lying," he said.

Martin cast him from him, and he sprawled on the sidewalk. From where he lay he could hear Martin's breath whistling from parted lips.

"Don't hurt me, Martin," he pleaded. "I'll do anything you tell me to do."

"Get up," Martin ordered.

Tom rose unsteadily. Martin's anger seemed to have passed as swiftly as it had come, and his voice cold as he delivered his ultimatum.

"Leave the other girls alone," he said. "See Milly every night she'll see you.

Be decent with her. Be good to her. Do whatever she wants you to do. And don't hurt her. That's all. Good night to you, Paterson."

He turned and strode away in the darkness. Paterson stood looking after him till his shadowy shape was altogether lost. Then he turned homeward, cursing in a rage so great that he had never dreamed he was capable of it. He fully realized his miserable situation: he stood between the gibes of his friends on one hand and the anger of Martin on the other.

DURING the next week Martin Jones' breast was torn with conflicting emotions. He was both glad and unhappy. Tom had gone to see Milly the next night after Martin had met him. He had stayed an hour and had then gone straight home. That program had been carried out each succeeding night but one. On Friday night Tom and Milly had gone to a dance at Macklin's. Martin believed that he had saved Milly from heartache, but he believed also that he had lost Milly forever. He suffered none the less in this latter belief when he considered the fact that he had never hoped to win Milly.

On the Saturday night of the week following, there was to be a boat-ride—with dancing—on the lake. Martin determined to go on this ride and then somewhat relax his vigilance. He thought Milly was entirely safe now. He was no psychologist, but he could understand that the fear which he had put into Tom Paterson's heart would live there a long time.

The day before the night of the boat-ride was a blistering one. There had been no rain for two weeks, and the air in the city had been as if it had swept over lakes of molten iron. The sky was cloudless; the sun was a brazen instead of a beneficent thing.

As the excursion steamer put out from its pier into the lake, there was a band of black, like crape low-hung, along the northwestern horizon. But the crowd, eager to escape the city, did not notice it. Their very souls were crying out for air.

As soon as the pier was left behind, the musicians strummed their instruments and began to play. But only a few went on the floor; the others remained outside, waiting for the first cool breathing of the night.

HIDDEN by the night, that band of crepe crept rapidly up the sky; soon it began to break, and through the breaks mountainous clouds poured. Suddenly a lightning-flash darted along the horizon, like a huge snake, and there was a crash of thunder. The musicians began to play more loudly. The boat was turned and headed toward shore. The clouds piled up the sky till they reached the zenith. Lightning-flashes constantly split the sky and thunder broke with an artillery-like report and a quiver of fear ran through the crowd, communicating itself from person to person. The lightning-flashes revealed girls clinging to their escorts. The escorts were staring into the northwest, eyes wide, faces blanched. The steamer was making for port under full steam.

A man appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Everybody go below," he said, trying to keep his voice level but being forced to raise it to make himself heard. "Take your time. There is no danger, but we want to know where everybody is. All below, please. This way."

There was a sudden rush for the stairway.

Martin Jones had been standing in the bow, brooding bitterly. He had seen Milly and Tom come aboard, and his lover's sense had told him that there was something new between them. Tom held his head differently. He even walked differently. Whatever it had been in his face that was most offensive to Martin, it had died out of it. Milly was subdued. She gave Martin a wan little smile.

When Martin saw the rush for the stairhead, he ran to the side of the man who was ordering the crowd below.

"I'll stick by," he said. "Tell me if I can do anything. They're scared."

"Keep 'em going two and two," the man replied. "Don't let 'em get into a panic. Kid 'em a little if you have to."

Martin raised his voice and began to

shout good-naturedly at the people he knew. His words had their effect. As these people passed him, they tried to smile back at him as he smiled. In five minutes they were all safely below.

BUT this was only the beginning. Until now there had been no wind. The water had been scudding into the southeast without it, smooth save for the tiny ripples which the scudding made. Now it rose in a sudden swell and began to break and roll. A moment more and the old boat was riding on great breakers which threatened to engulf it.

The black clouds huddled down toward the boat, the lightning flamed at it, and the rain swept over it torrentially. It seemed as if the storm sought this poor old craft alone as its prey.

The boat's captain had come to stand with Martin Jones at the head of the cabin stairway. They were both drenched to the skin, and they could not make each other hear above the roar of the storm. But the same thought was in the minds of both. They knew that at any moment stark panic, horror-born, might begin to run through that crowd of boys and girls below. They were merely standing by to do what they could in that eventuality.

Martin, standing so, felt a hand on his arm. He turned, to find Tom Paterson and Milly at his elbow. To Martin, Tom was a strange, new being. He was not afraid. He was calm, with an uncanny kind of calmness. He seemed like a man whose blood has turned to ice. Tom spoke, but Martin could not make out what he said.

Tom took him by the arm then, and, leading Milly with his other hand, guided Martin back to the dance-hall. The walls of this made a little shelter, so that the wind could not catch Tom's voice from his lips and sweep it away.

"Take this girl," Tom said. "She loves you. Be good to her. You're a fool, but I guess you're an honest fool. . . . . There's going to be trouble in that crowd down there. That's why I brought her away. Your job is to see that no harm comes to her. . . . . I'm going back to do what I can."

"I'll go too," Martin said.

"You bonehead," Tom broke out, "do as I tell you! Do you want her to get hurt? You're husky. You can do more for her in a pinch than I can. And she loves you—*you*—I tell you."

Without another word, he was gone. Martin turned to the girl.

"Was what he said true—about you loving *me?*" he whispered.

She nodded, her eyes full of tears. Martin took her hand in his and held it.

"I'll see that no harm comes to you," he said.

"That's what Tom said you'd do," Milly agreed.

THE storm reached its climax. The lightning-flashes were so close now that they seemed to sear their way across the very deck of the boat. The thunder broke incessantly, near at hand. The rain came down in solid sheets.

But even above that awful din another sound came to the ears of Martin and Milly. It was the sound of a crowd gone mad with fear. Martin put Milly's hand down gently.

"I must go and see what they're doing," he said. "You stay here. You understand?"

Again Milly nodded. He went out on the deck and reached the head of the stairway. The captain was there, leaning down and shouting and gesticulating. Martin noticed, oddly, that his face and neck were purple.

Martin reached the head of the stairs just as the crowd started up it. His first glance showed him that Tom Paterson had been standing at the foot of the stairs, trying to prevent that upward rush by talking to the crowd.

But to that crowd had come the sense of being shut in while death menaced them. That had brought a feeling of nauseating suffocation. They wanted to get away from where they were, even though the place they fought their way to might be a hundred times more perilous than the one they fled from.

MARTIN took his place beside the captain and began to scream down to those who were already coming up the stairs. He heard Tom yelling at them to go back, saw him strike out

futilely at the man nearest him, saw the man strike back, saw Tom go down, supine across the stairs. Then the crowd rushed up those stairs like maddened cattle. The human animals flowed over Tom Paterson and obscured him from Martin's view.

Martin felt himself borne back against the rail. Men were shouting and women were screaming. Their hot breaths were in his face. He began to strike out coolly, with all his strength behind his blows. Three men fell back against the rail opposite Martin. Half a dozen women were in his vicinity. He seized them and put them behind him. His assault had given the crowd momentary check. He raised his voice and began to talk to them.

"The storm's dyin' out," he cried. "Can't you see the lightning's almost gone? There's hardly any thunder. The rain's lettin' up. What's eating all you cattle, anyhow?"

They raised their heads and realized that his words were true. The old boat still pitched and groaned in every ancient timber, but she was tossing through a lessening storm. Where fear had been, shame swept in. Men hung their heads and girls began to cry, or to laugh nervously.

They were glad to have escaped death. And they had all escaped—except Tom Paterson, who lay on the floor at the far, dim end of the cabin with a canvas shrouding his body. His neck had been broken and his life crushed out by that mad rush over him.

To Martin, standing dumbly beside that body ten minutes later, came the captain.

"They's a lady in the dance-hall wants to see you—wants to know if you are all right," the captain said.

"Tell her I'm all right," Martin replied. "Tell her Mr. Paterson has been —hurt. Tell her I'll take care of him. When we get to port, have her go right home and wait up for me. I'll see her later in the evening."

IT was with a heavy, almost unwilling step that he approached Milly's home at eleven o'clock. He had found, to his surprise, that Tom had been without relatives or near friends in the city. He had had what was left of him taken care of.

Milly met him at the door and he entered without a word. In her little sitting-room he, strong man and brave, stood with bowed head and made his confession.

"I bullied him and threatened him," he said. "I thought he was a dirty dog but he wasn't. He was a good, game man."

"He told me," Milly said gently. "He came to me and said you would harm him if he didn't see only me. He —he almost begged me to let him come to see me every night for a while. I let him come."

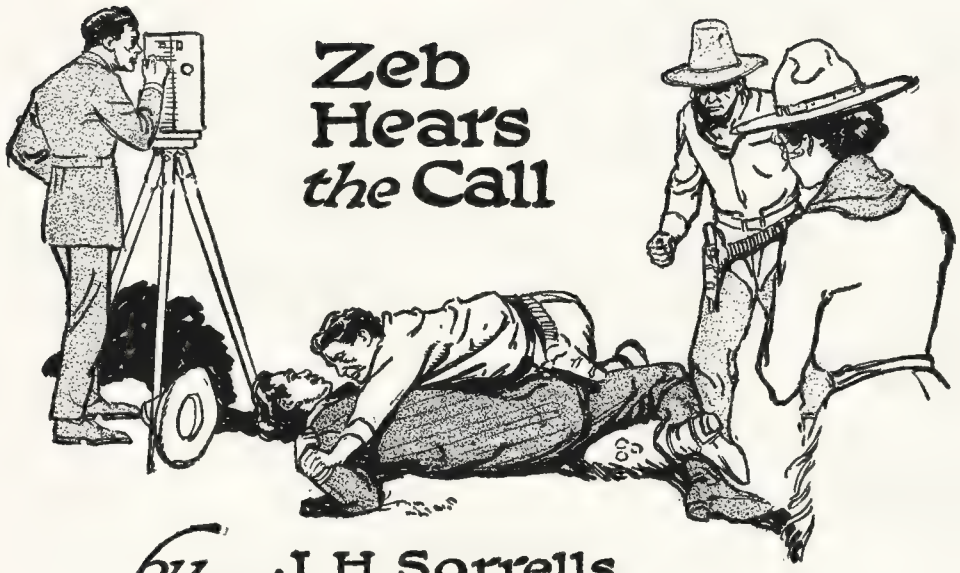
She tried to go on, but she could not at once. Her woman's heart told her the significance of Tom Paterson's death, but she was not wise enough to voice that significance to Martin. At last she only put her hand on his arm and whispered:

"We sat together here at night and talked. He came to tell me about himself. He had never had a father or a mother from the time he was three years old. He lived in an orphan asylum, and it wasn't the good kind. When he came out of there, he was bitter and inclined to be wild. He thought all the world was like that orphan asylum had been.

"But here in the quiet we got to talking about things, and he grew to be different. He grew to be very gentle and kind with me. While I sewed under the lamp there, he'd sit and look at me. He said one night that he had learned for the first time what a home could be. He had learned that there was goodness in the world. He said he loved me. He wanted to marry me. But I told him I couldn't. I said I loved you."

"I see," said Martin. "And so, in the end, he came to die like a man. I did him wrong. I can't undo that. I can only bury him like he was my brother and keep his memory green."

"And keep his memory green," Milly agreed.



Zeb Hears the Call

by J. H. Sorrells

I WAS in a small town in southern California. It was hot, and I was thirsty. I turned into a near-by liquor dispensary. I found an unoccupied table secluded amidst cooling palms, and under a still more cooling electric fan. I ordered a bottle of that which is advertised as having made a certain city famous, and was sinking my nose inch by inch in a foaming glass of that same liquid, when a voice at my elbow caused me to withdraw my snout from the foam with a jerk.

I recognized in that voice a familiar tone. It was such a voice, that once heard, it could never be forgotten. It resembled a cross between the rasping of a rusty hinge, and the low note on a steam calliope.

"Care if I sit here, friend?" That was what the voice said.

I did not care. Furthermore, I arose with a joyous whoop and extended the rosy palm of good fellowship to the owner of that voice. It was none other than Zeb Covington.

The last time I had seen Zeb was when I was leaning over the back end of a parlor-car gripping his hand, swallowing hard, and telling him good-by while the train moved slowly out of a little cattle town in western Texas. Zeb and I had been pals. We had ridden the range together; we had bunked together, fought together and sometimes starved together. We had punched cows and mined; we had sold solid gold watches for a dollar apiece and peddled lightning rods; we had shot greasers and run faro-games. When I got a telegram from home saying Uncle William had died and left me his millions, I had tried to persuade Zeb to go back with me. But he had shaken his head; and I had bade him farewell at Tin Gulch. That was over fifteen years ago.

Zeb was as surprised and as delighted to see me as I was him. After the long-lost-friend clinch, we settled down and got a few perfunctory remarks off our minds; then we eyed each other inventorially.

"You start first, Zeb," I said. "Proceed—explain, elucidate, speak, orate; what about yourself—since I left?"

Zeb stroked a tight-fitting trouser-leg with one hand, and with the other he pushed down a shiny, immaculate collar which was giving an imitation of the strangle-hold on his Adam's apple. Then he looked down with an appraising eye at a pair of number nine patent-leather shoes which he had stretched

over his number eleven feet. After that he looked at me and grinned.

"Say, Pete," he drawled, "I am a moving-picture actor."

"A—what!"

"None other than what I have just stated," he said. "You see before you the world's greatest moving-picture outlaw, cow-puncher, miner and horseman."

"You mean that you are one of those guys who wear tenderfoot cow-puncher's clothes and ride a broken-down nag in a posse going to rescue the heroine from the greaser? Zeb, I am ashamed of you. When I saw you last, you were pursuing the noble trade of punching cows."

"First," he returned with dignity, "the Antiversal Company don't employ none of them tenderfoot riders; they used to, but they don't now. They have got real riders, and the chief of 'em is yours truly, Zeb Covington. As for the noble pursuit of punching cows, that is a back number; it isn't done any more. Besides that, if you want to get the real thrills, try what I'm doing."

"How did you get in; how came you ever to start acting?"

"It's a long story, Pete," he replied, "but if you have time to listen, I'll tell it."

"With the exception of a million and a half dollars which I am trying to squander, I have nothing else but time," I answered.

"Well," he said, "here goes. . . . . First, though, it seems like one of us has forgot how to buy."

I called a waiter. "Bring us a couple of bottles of beer," I said. "After that, bring some more. Then keep bringing them at intervals of two minutes until this gentleman across the table from me begins to demonstrate how he helped catch Black Bill. Then call the cops, a doctor and the ambulance. On with the story, Zeb."

Thus encouraged, he began.

MY story dates back five years. That was when I broke into the acting business. The way it was is this:

I went from Tin Gulch, when you left, over into Oklahoma. I punched cows there awhile. Then I moved farther West. I punched cows, mined a little and bucked faro—everything, in fact, that we used to do together. At the end of five years, I landed down in southern Texas, and went to work for a man by the name of Stewart. Old Jack was as good a sort as I ever saw. He was a real sport, and man all the way through. Well, he had a son named Bob. And Bob took right after his daddy. That boy was some kid. I got real friendly with him from the first—he wasn't more than sixteen when I first went there. I stayed five years with old Jack, when—but that's getting ahead a little bit.

Old Jack had as a neighbor of his, a farmer by the name of Coleman—Ned Coleman. Well, old Ned had a daughter. Gee, she was a daisy! She was as pretty as a picture of a warm fireside on a cold wintry night. She and Bob grew up together, and they were sweethearts—just a kid affair, you know. But there came a time when Bob wanted to marry her.

Well, old Ned Coleman didn't have anything but his five hundred acres under poor cultivation and heavy mortgage, and it would seem that he would be more than willing that the girl—her name was Marguerite, and her mother was Spanish—should become Mrs. Bob Stewart. And old Ned was.

But the girl, she didn't have the same idea concerning the matter. She didn't seem to care a straw about the Stewart estate, and much less did she seem to care about marrying the sole heir of said estate.

Now, there ought to be some reason for everything. And Marguerite had her reason, though I'm fair in admitting that I couldn't see the logic of the reason. But anyhow, the reason Marguerite didn't jump at the chance to hitch herself to the Stewart estate was that a movie show had opened up in town. Marguerite simply ate them up. She loved them like a boy-kid does a new pocketknife. For me, I couldn't figure it out. I had seen some of the pictures, and for the life of me, I couldn't see anything so durn lovable about them. But Bob explained it to me.

"It aint the pictures she loves," he grumbled, "it's one of them actors."

"You mean to tell me," I said, "that a real live woman can be in love with one of them shadow men?"

"You have hit the bull's-eye," he returned. "That is it exactly. She keeps preaching them pictures and that actor to me. I think his name is William Collins. She keeps telling me how handsome he is, how refined he seems, how brave he is, how strong he is. She says I am uncouth."

I LOOKED at Bob and shook my head. I couldn't understand the woman. Bob was tall, and had clear blue eyes, and sorter brown hair, and as fine a smile as you ever saw. Of course Bob hadn't been off to college, and he didn't talk proper, maybe. And the only brave things I ever saw him do was to ride Flint-eyes, and swim out into the river and bring a drowning nigger boy to the bank. Flint-eyes had never been rode before, and he had killed two busters. Maybe they wasn't such brave things, but I reckon he could have been as brave as Collins if he wanted to. Bob looked good to me!

Well, matters rocked along just so. I went to St. Louis one June with a train of beeves, and when I got back, I questioned Bob as to how matters were progressing.

"She is still in love with that actor," he said. "And he is coming down here in a week."

"He is coming here?" I asked slowly. "What for?"

"His company is going to take hunks of this scenery around here," he answered, "and he is coming to be in a play—a Western play. Marguerite is near 'bout dead with excitement."

The company came, and Collins came with it. He didn't look to me like he was such a bear. He was handsome, and that's a fact, but otherwise he was a sort of ordinary-looking fellow to me. Once I rode out to where they were making the pictures, and I saw Marguerite out there. She was sitting in the shade of a tree and talking to Collins. She was all smiles and so was he.

I rode back to the ranch and told Bob what I had seen. He laughed shortly. "You aint telling me anything," he said. "She spends most of her time out there. She says she might become an actress. Said the country was not for her. Besides, Mr. Collins said she was an ideal type for the screen."

"I reckon you and she don't hit it off very well since he came," I observed.

"I'm sorter scarce around the Coleman domicile," he said. "Marguerite don't exactly wreathe in smiles when my form appears over the horizon, and she don't exactly shed tears when said form departs."

FINALLY the picture outfit left. Then I thought maybe Bob would have a look-in, and I told him that now was the time: Collins was gone, and maybe everything would be all right.

Bob looked sorter mournful, but he saddled his pony and hit the dusty road to Marguerite's. He came back 'bout forty minutes later. His face was red, and he was frothing at the mouth nearly, he was so mad.

"Did she—" I began, but he cut me off short.

"She did — she has gone," he snapped. He ran into the house and came out shoving a gun in his pants, and lugging a grip.

"Say, Bobbie, what's the idea?" I asked.

He stopped in front of me. "You are going too," he said.

"Ramify," I said. "I and you are going where?"

"We're going to Los Angeles," he said, "where Marguerite is."

"Oh," I said; "and what is Marguerite doing there?"

"Fool!" he shouted. "She—she—she went there! She followed Collins!"

"Calm down, my boy, and tell your uncle Zeb about it," I advised.

Well, he did. It seems that he had loped over with the purpose in view of seeing Marguerite. He found old Ned walking up and down like a lion in a cage, and gnashing his teeth like the same. He learned upon question,

that Marguerite had gone. She left upon the receipt of a letter from Collins. She had left her daddy a note saying that she and Mr. Collins would probably be married; that she was going to be a great actress, because Mr. Collins had said so; and a lot about her talents, and the gay city life and some more. Well, old Ned was mad clean through. But he was rheumatic and broke, and he couldn't do anything but roar. However, Bob whirled his pinto around and breezed home. Bob had decided what he was going to do; he was going to Los Angeles, and find her, and bring her back. He had decided that I was going too.

That was a question that I didn't stop to argue. I shoved a gun between my vest and my shirt, and me and Bob caught the midnight train going west. We sat up all night talking. We talked mostly about Mr. Collins. We got awful mad at that fellow. The more we talked, the madder we got. If we had seen one Mr. Collins just about then, what we would have done to him would have made the siege at Verdun seem like a Sunday-school ice-cream social.

WE arrived in Los Angeles three days later. Los Angeles is a big town, and me and Bob were like a couple of specks of butter in a churn; we were bumped about and shoved until we didn't know whether we were on *terra firma* or climbing the steps from Purgatory to Heaven. So I said to Bob:

"Let's get somewhere out of this crowd."

He agreed most profanely, and we did. We strolled along a street that was fairly quiet and deserted, and we began to map out our campaign. But there we were plumb up against it. The man who had the job hunting for the needle in the haystack had a proposition as soft as a middle-aged man with the dropsy compared to our job of finding Marguerite in that town. There weren't any signs; all trails looked alike.

"We are like a ship without a rudder," said Bob.

That suggested schooners to my mind, and it wasn't more than a pair of minutes until me and Bob was growing on easy and sociable terms with a bartender with a red wart on his nose.

Well, the more sociable and familiar we got with that bartender, the more troubles we found we had to drown. We started off drowning 'em two at a time. Pretty soon we were sinking 'em a dozen at a time, till all the troubles in the world must have been strangling for breath.

The bartender got more and more courteous, and Bob and me got more and more sociable and familiar. Bob got so familiar that he tried to caress that little red wart on the bartender's nose. It must have been a pet of that guy's, because he put a great big hairy hand on Bob's face and pushed. That was an exceedingly discourteous action, and in a jiffy the knight of the beer-pump was suffering excruciating indignities at our hands.

I wound up and cracked Mr. Bartender an awful wallop under the ear. Just as I did so, a little bow-legged runt grabbed me by the arm and whispered real throaty:

"Say, Zeb, cut the activities and come with me *pronto*. The cops are coming!"

I laid hands off that bartender long enough to tell that bow-legged butt-in to take a running jump to the hottest place I knew of.

But that didn't stop him. "Say, Zeb," he whispered again, "don't you know me? Hurry!"

BY this time some of the denizens of the barroom had joined in, and there was a lovely little scrap going on. I took a long-distance crack at the mass and then took time out to address some remarks at my persistent friend.

"Your face does seem some familiar," I said to him with real dignity, "but at the present I cannot recall ever having had an introduction to you. However, if you will call sometime and present your cognomen engraved on the proper kind of stationery, I will be pleased beyond words to make your acquaintance. In the meantime, striking business occupies my mind." And I aimed at a red-headed truck-driver,

and landed right square on the red nose of a cop.

After that I didn't remember anything until I woke up next morning in a boarding-house room with rust in my throat and a lump on my head. I raised up to take a further inventory of my surroundings, when I heard a noise like the twelve o'clock whistle of a boiler-factory. Looking around, I discovered Bob, his head making a dirty splotch on the other pillow, his mouth hanging open, and the noise mentioned, being emitted therefrom. I applied my elbow to his ribs real actively, and we were preparing to settle the dispute, when the door opened, and who should walk in but my friend the little bow-legged runt! He was dressed in cow-puncher's clothes, and they looked like the real thing, too. Somehow, his face looked familiar; that is, it seemed like I had known him somewhere.

"Well, how do you feel this mornin?" he drawled. "I had to hock you outer jail after you hit that cop last night, Zeb."

"Who the blazes are you?" I asked.

He smiled, and rolled a cigarette with one hand. "Say, Zeb," he drawled again, "do you remember when you and Pete Gilliam and me was snowed in up in Wyoming one winter—and I tried to teach you to roll 'em this way?"

I rolled out of bed and grabbed him round the neck. It was nobody but Jim Watson, and I hadn't seen him for twelve years.

I introduced Bob and then demanded some explanations. He said the reason of the cow-puncher rig was that he was riding for a moving-picture company. He had recognized me the night before and had stuck around to get me out of any trouble I might get in, and which he was sure I would.

BOB looked up interestedly when Jim mentioned moving pictures, and asked him what company he was with.

"I'm with the Antiversal Company," said Jim, "and I'm riding in William Collins' Western pictures now."

Me and Bob both spoke at the same time. "Well, I'll be hanged!" That was what we said.

Then we explained our troubles to Jim. "The dirty cuss," he said. "He aint such a good egg," he added.

Me and Bob got up and put on our clothes. "We are going out there with you," I said. "We are going to pay our respects to Mr. Collins."

Well, we went out to the studio. It looked more like a big ranch. Jim showed us where Collins' dressing-room was, and me and Bob went in without knocking.

There he stood putting some make-up on his face. He was undressed from the waist up, and believe me, he sure looked some muscular!

"Are you William Collins?" asked Bob. His voice sounded like long, thin icicles.

"I am," Collins answered. "What can I do for you?"

"Where is Marguerite?" asked Bob.

Collins didn't appear perturbed a bit. He put a little more blacking on his eyebrow, and then answered slowly: "She is at her room in town, right now. What business is it of yours?"

"I'll show you what business it is of mine," Bob answered, and he was fixing to take a poke at Collins when I caught his arm.

"MR. COLLINS," I said, "my name is Covington—Zeb Covington; my friend here is known by a sound similar to Stewart. Miss Coleman ran away from home several days ago. It is thought that she left upon your instigation. Her father, old Ned Coleman, being unable to make the trip here, deputized us to return to him his runaway daughter."

He laughed. "Do you have the faintest idea that you will take her back with you?" he asked confidently.

"We do," I asserted, and as I said so, I loosened the buttons on my vest.

"Well," he said savagely, "I have a different idea about it. I am going to throw both of you out of here," and he started at me.

Out came my Gatlin'—and I aint so slow on the draw. I put the cold, round muzzle against the pit of his stomach.

"We'll argue," I said.

Mr. Collins seemed to be sorter

afraid of that gun. He backed away, and his eyes got plumb respectful. Collins is a great fighter, and I'm ready to admit it, but he usually fights with his hands, and I guess he wasn't on familiar terms with a gun. Anyhow he sat down real sudden, and said: "Turn that thing the other way."

"Now, son," I said, "let's talk awhile. You seemed to think, just a minute ago, that my friend here and me would have a bit of trouble in taking Miss Coleman home to her poor old father. You also seemed to insinuate that you would be the chief obstacle in our way. Have you got over that feeling?"

"Yes," he answered, just as meek as Moses.

"All right, then," I said, and I shoved my gun back into its nest. "Now you can give us Miss Coleman's address. After that, we wont need you any more."

"She is on as an extra," he said, "and she will be here at the studio this morning. If you wait, possibly you will be able to see her sooner."

"We'll wait," I returned. "Bob, let's stroll around a bit."

As we left the dressing-room, Collins gave us a parting shot. "Did you stop to think," he said, "that possibly Marguerite will not want to go home with you? that she would rather stay here near me?"

DO you know, that's exactly what that little snip did? We saw her in front of one of the women's dressing-rooms, and I told her that we had come to take her home to her daddy. She positively refused to go. She loosened up her tongue, and she gave me and Bob a good lashing. She called us meddlers, and said furthermore that we had acted positively crude toward Mr. Collins, and that she would not have another thing to do with either of us. Then she tilted her nose and breezed right on by us.

What could I do? I couldn't kidnap her; and I couldn't pull my gat' and make her go home. She was a woman. It struck me right there that women are mighty particular hard things to deal with.

I said to Bob: "Let's go." And we went. We went back to town, and Bob hired a room. "I'm going to stay here, and I'm going to take her back home," he said, "if it takes me all my life." And he said that in them cold tones he uses when he means business.

We hung on a week, and then Bob went back to the studio. He came back to the room with a long face. "Same old story," he said mournfully. "She is figuring on marrying Collins," he added.

That last didn't sound so good to me. Somehow, I had a hunch that Mr. Collins' intentions were not as stated by Marguerite. He didn't look like the marrying kind to me. I shook my head over the prospect. I had half a mind to go out there and plug that guy just for luck. I would have, I reckon, but Jim Watson argued me out of it.

"It aint like it used to be, Zeb," he said. "A killing is murder now. But say, I'll tell you what: you and your friend come out to the studio and get a job. You can both ride, and they need some good riders. Then you-all can sorter keep an eye on the girl—and on him."

Did we take him up? You bet we did. We went out with him bright and early the next morning, and we both got jobs riding. Gee, it was easy! You ought to have seen some of the boys they had riding! And you ought to have seen Collins. He was a circus—that part of the circus where the clown tries to ride the bucking mule! The way they would film him would be to hobble the horse, and then take a picture of him shading his eyes with his hand, and looking across the prairie—though the prairie wasn't nothing but a ten-acre lot!

But say! On the ground, that Collins was a bear. He was a hoss! He is some actor, that boy is. And he aint no tenderfoot at man-sized jobs, either. He always tries to make all his scenes realistic, and whenever there is a fight to be pulled off, it aint no stall; it's a real fight. Once he was to be in a prize-fight scene, and they hired a real prize-fighter to go against him. That was some scrap! But do you know, that Collins whipped the stuffin' out of that

pug. He is a handy scrapper with his fists, that Collins is!

HE and Bob stuck around for two weeks. During that time, Marguerite wouldn't speak to us. She acted like she didn't know we was on the earth; and part of the time we was acting right with her, too! But you can't tell about a woman, can you? Bob acted right well before the camera. They kept putting him in more important parts, and the director said he was going to make an actor out of him. But you can believe me, that was small consolation to Bob.

Well, they started a Western picture which the director said was going to be the greatest five-reel Western drama ever produced. Collins was, as usual, the star. And little Marguerite Coleman was cast for an important part—she was to be the girl whose father ran the Yellow Dog saloon, and who started the whole trouble in the story. One scene of the picture was where the hero (Collins), a sort of gentleman gambler, was to have a quarrel with a cow-puncher over the girl. Marguerite was the girl, and by gosh, who should they put in to play the cow-puncher but Bob!

The 'script read that the puncher was to pull his gun on the gambler, and the gambler was to knock it out of his hand, and then they were to clinch and fight it out until the gambler had whaled the stuffing out of the puncher.

Now that part about the gambler knocking the gun out of the puncher's hand was fake stuff, because Bob could have plugged him six times before he got started. But the fight!

Just before they put the camera on the scene, Collins walked up to Bob and said:

"It has been my practice never to fake a fight. I want the real thing. Are you willing? or are you afraid without your gun?"

"A fight with you," said Bob real low, "a fight with you will be a pleasure to me any way you want to take it."

Well, they rehearsed it for the last time, and then the camera was set on the scene, and the operator began cranking.

EVERYTHING came off according to schedule. Collins knocked the gun out of Bob's hand, and they clinched. They broke away, and then it started.

Say, don't you feel funny when you have a pal who is fighting his liver out, and you standing by and can't get in and help? I just stood there tingling all over, and itching to lay my bony knuckles against that actor's jaw just once.

But if I couldn't plant my knuckles there, Bob could—and he did. He played a tune on that Collins' jaw with his fists. Every time Bob would hit, Collins would grunt. But Collins wasn't standing there hitched and letting Bob punch him—not by a durn sight! He was hitting too, and he was hitting hard. Blood began to run out of Bob's nose, and Collins had a lip which was split open and bleeding, so the fight up to that point was about even.

Then Collins began to gain ground. Bob was fighting—Lordy, but he was fighting! But he had the look on his face of a man who is fighting a losing fight and knows it. The look in his eyes told me just plain as day: "What good will it do me to win? It wont make any difference to her." It wasn't long till Collins had lammed him one in the eye, and knocked him down.

Bob was up in a minute, and back at Collins. But it sure seemed to be a losing fight after that knockdown. If I ever wanted to plug a man, it was then. I guess I must have reached inside my vest, because Jim grabbed my arm. "Steady, Zeb," he whispered.

Collins floored Bob again, and the kid got up on pure nerve. But he kept punching at Collins' smiling face. Collins poked him one behind the ear, and Bob swung around slowly; it seemed like he was going to drop—for good.

THEN the unexpected happened. You never, never can tell about a woman. They sure are peculiar creatures. That little Marguerite who had been crouching against the bar, just as the 'script directed, flopped up from there, and jumped straight at Bob. She slapped him on the shoulder just as he swung around. I saw her eyes. They

were flashing, and they shone with a light of hot murder.

"Soak him, Bob!" she cried. "Hit him—hard. Ram his teeth down his lying throat!"

There wasn't nothing to it after that. Bob swung around, and he swung right on Mr. Collins' mouth. And Mr. Collins went down. He got up, spit two teeth out, and came at Bob again. Bob knocked him down. Collins got up, and he knocked him down again—and again, and again, and again. When Collins got too weak to get up by himself, Bob would pick him up, and then knock him down again. He beat that actor up until you couldn't see anything of his face except blood and raw spots.

The director was jumping up and down. He was mad with pure joy. That had been the greatest fight scene he had ever directed. Now all that was to be done was to change the 'script around a little bit, and let Bob be the hero, and Collins the villain. It was great! That was what the director said about it.

But Bob shook his head. "We're quitting," he said.

Then the director raved sure enough. He wasn't going to let Bob quit! That was the greatest fight scene yet! If Bob quit, it would ruin his gigantic Western drama—"The Call of the Wild," it was named.

But Bob shook his head again. "We're quitting," he said again, and he held out his hand to Marguerite. "Come on," he said. And what do you think? That little gal followed him as meek as a lamb. We went back to town, and to Marguerite's rooms.

"Pack your things," Bob said to her quietly.

Marguerite packed them.

"Now," said Bob, "we are going down and find a preacher and get married. Then we are going home."

Then do you know what that fool woman did? She came up real close to Bob, and she put her arms around his neck, laid her head on his breast and started crying.

"You poor, bruised darlin'," she said. "Y-you are wonderful, B-Bob. I—I love you." Then she kissed—

When that started, I went down to get a drink.

AT this point Zeb made such a long pause that I thought he never would go on.

"And then—" I encouraged him.

"They got married and left that night for Texas. I didn't go back with them, though they both begged me to. Somehow, I sorter felt that I would be in the way. Anyhow, I had felt the itch. I had begun to hear the call—the call of the old days. But the old days were gone, Pete,—gone for good,—so I took the next best; I took the movies, where I can still ride, and shoot Mexicans, and play faro in a frontier barroom and dig for gold. So here I am, Pete! It's all play-doings, but it's real exciting sometimes. Say, Pete, do you know what? I'm a real live grandpappy—a god-grandpappy. Those fool kids went and named their boy after me!"

"Zeb," I said, "your story has been interesting. So interesting has it been, that I wont bore you with the tame existence I have been through since we parted. . . . . Here, waiter, two more bottles."

An hour later Zeb looked at me real wild-like and said:

"Pete, d'I ever tell you—how I helped catch Black Bill?"

I beckoned to the waiter. "The ambulance," I said briefly.

"THE CONQUERING WOMAN"

STANLEY SHAW, who wrote "A Siren of the Snows" and other popular novels, is the author of a short serial, *"The Conquering Woman,"* which will begin in our next issue. Don't miss the first vivid installment—in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale February 1st.

The Fair Impostor

CHAPTER I

A Night Adventure

GREGORY had been walking through utter darkness; and now he collided with a tree. He leaned against it dizzily, a groan escaping his lips. For a moment he thought he was going to lose consciousness again, but he summoned all his reserve strength and presently his brain cleared somewhat.

"Lord," he muttered, "isn't there a house somewhere near here?"

He took out his handkerchief, already wet with blood from a cut on his head, and mopped the cut out anew. It was beginning to throb a little. His whole head ached.

For what had seemed to him a long time but in reality had been only ten minutes, he staggered along the country road, seeking a house where he might get aid. For some time before this he had lain at the roadside with the night-rain beating down on him. He was wet through, and stiff. How long he had lain beside the road he did not know.

After a while he stepped away from the tree into the road. It was ankle-deep in mud. Here and there were pools of water. The big trees on either side of the road shut off any light which might have dropped down from the stormy, leaden sky.

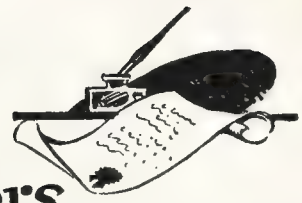
Slipping now and then, splashed to the knees with mud, he staggered on. Now and then he turned his head from side to side, still seeking a light. When he was about to give up and rest again, he caught sight of one. At first he thought it must be on another road—it seemed so far away. He stopped and tried to strike a match to catch a glimpse of his surroundings, but the match flickered out in the wind as soon as it sprang into life.

But the light he had seen had given him a little hope, and he started toward it. Twice again he collided with a tree, but he felt turf beneath his feet and knew that he was crossing a lawn. A moment later he stepped on gravel and judged he was on a path leading to a house.

Following the gravel with wavering

A Complete Novelette

by Charles Wesley Sanders



feet, he came out from under the trees. Before him he could make out the dim lines of a big house. A light was burning in a front room.

"By George," he said, "this must be the place. I knew I wasn't far from it."

HE advanced and came to stone steps. He mounted to a small porch between high, graceful pillars. Before him was a screen-door. He ran his hand along the casing and found a push-button. With a sigh of relief he pressed the button. There was no sound from within the house, and he was about to press the button again when a servant appeared back of the screen-door. The servant stood staring at the disheveled figure.

"What is it?" the servant asked icily.

"Is Mr. Ramsdell at home?" Gregory asked.

"Yes, he's at home," the servant answered.

"I should like to see him," Gregory said. "I am not a tramp, if you please. I have had an accident. I can explain to Mr. Ramsdell."

The servant eyed him doubtfully for a moment.

"Wait there," he said then.

At the end of another minute the servant was back, a gray-haired man following him. The servant stood aside, and the gray-haired man came to the door.

"My name is Gregory," Gregory said. "I am a lawyer from Cincinnati. I was motoring through here and was held up down the road. I have been hurt. I should like to be permitted to call a doctor. May I step in and use your phone?"

"Open the door," the man commanded the servant.

The servant obeyed. Gregory wiped the mud from his feet on the door-mat and stepped inside. Ramsdell scrutinized him swiftly and appeared to be satisfied.

"Come with me," he said. To the servant he added: "Get a glass of brandy. Call Dr. Blake right away. Tell him to come at once. Explain what has happened."

He led Gregory into a library off the long hall and motioned him to a seat. The servant came with the brandy, and Gregory drank it. He felt stronger. The servant disappeared, and in a minute Gregory heard him calling a number on the telephone.

"I am sorry to intrude like this—" Gregory began.

THEN he stopped. A girl had appeared in the doorway. At sight of Gregory, his face blood-stained, his clothing muddy, she paused. She and Gregory stared into each other's eyes.

He saw a tall young woman with deep brown eyes and light hair. The eyes held Gregory's attention. He judged that ordinarily they were clear, untroubled eyes, but now there was a suggestion of fear in them. In spite of the fact that Gregory was injured, she seemed to question his presence there.

"Come in, my dear," said Ramsdell. "This is Mr. Gregory. He has met with an accident."

Gregory started to rise, but the girl quickly bade him keep his seat.

"How were you hurt?" she asked eagerly.

"I was just going to explain to Mr. Ramsdell," Gregory said.

"How did you know his name?" the girl demanded.

There was a kind of challenge in her tone. She had sat down and she was leaning toward Gregory, her eyes brilliant and her red lips parted. Gregory smiled a rather hard smile.

"Nearly everyone has heard of Mr. Ramsdell," he said. "I knew he lived in this neighborhood, and as soon as I saw him I recognized him from photographs that have been in the newspapers. . . . . There is nothing strange in that, is there?"

Now his own voice held a definite challenge. But the girl only leaned back in her chair and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Tell us how you were hurt," she said quietly.

"I have been motoring for several days," Gregory said, his eyes fixed on her face. "To-night I thought I could make the next town east of here. That was my temporary destination. I knew a storm was coming, but I didn't think it would be so severe. I hadn't time to get my top up before I was drenched. I knew Mr. Ramsdell lived hereabout, and when the storm caught me, I hoped to find his house and seek shelter for the night.

"I came into the long lane of trees on this road just as the storm broke. It was very dark. I could see nothing. There were no lights anywhere. I felt my way along for half a mile. Just as I thought I must be nearing this house, I saw a lantern being swung across the road. It was the sort of signal railroad-men use. I nosed up to the light and stopped. A man jumped up on the left-hand running-board. I asked him what he wanted. He wore a mask over his eyes, and he affected uncouth manners, but he was no tramp. I noticed that the hand he steadied himself with was white and smooth. He said that he just wanted to look me over.

"I told him to get down. He laughed. I struck out at him, and he sprang down then. Then there was a voice at my right. I turned about and looked into the muzzle of a revolver. Another man was holding it. . . . . Well, I'm afraid I lost my temper. I struck out at this man too, and then I received a blow on the side of the head. When I recovered consciousness, I was lying beside the road. I knew this house could not be far away, and I managed to get here."

"Were you robbed?" Ramsdell interposed.

"I haven't made an inventory," Gregory answered.

HE drew a wallet from his pocket and examined its contents. His money was gone, but there were a couple of letters which the hold-up men had not touched. He handed those to Ramsdell.

"They will identify me," he said.

Ramsdell glanced at them.

"That's all right, Mr. Gregory," Ramsdell said, handing them back. "Your money was taken?"

"Yes, a couple of hundred dollars," Gregory answered. "It looks like a case of robbery."

"But wasn't it strange that those men should be out there in the road in the storm on the chance of meeting some one with money?" the girl questioned. "They'd hardly expect anyone to be abroad on a night like this."

"That's true," Gregory assented. "I had thought of that, but the fact that they took my money shows they were bent on robbery, doesn't it?"

"Would you know them if you saw them again?" the girl asked.

Her eagerness had come back. Gregory felt that her questions were not idle. But he had reasons for withholding information from her. His experience had left a vivid impression on his mind. He could hear again the voices of the two men. He remembered perfectly their builds. The man who had first climbed up on the machine had had two gold-filled teeth in front. There was a scar on the first finger of the hand which had clutched the side of the car. Those little things Gregory had seen in the lantern-light, and they were enough to lead him to believe that he would recognize one of the men at least if he saw him again. Of the other he was not so sure. His colloquy with him had been brief.

"I can hardly say," he answered

carelessly, though his eyes did not leave the girl's face.

He saw her breathe out that little sigh of relief again, and again she sank back in her chair.

There was the sound of an automobile outside.

"There's the Doctor, Mr. Gregory," Ramsdell said. "We'll soon have you fixed up. Helen, will you meet Dr. Blake, please?"

The girl left the room.

"By the way, where is your car, Mr. Gregory?" Ramsdell asked.

"It's gone," Gregory said. "It was nowhere in sight when I recovered consciousness."

"I'll have the sheriff sent for," Ramsdell said. "He can come over first thing in the morning. It's a plain case of robbery."

"I'm not so sure about that," Gregory said to himself as Dr. Blake and the girl entered the room.

RAMSDELL explained briefly what had happened to Gregory. The Doctor fingered the cut on his head.

"A bad cut," he said. "Not dangerous, however, since we have got it so soon. It'll require a few stitches. If you will just come to the bathroom with me, Mr. Gregory—"

Gregory accompanied him and Dr. Blake sewed up the wound. Then he bandaged Gregory's head.

"Great guns," Gregory said, with a glance into the mirror, "how long do I have to go about looking like this?"

"The stitches can come out in four or five days," the Doctor answered. "The bandage will have to remain on for a week or so. You can't risk an infection, you know."

He gathered up his instruments, and Gregory followed him down to the library. The girl was there alone.

"Mr. Ramsdell has gone to bed," she explained. "He was feeling tired. He wanted to see you, Dr. Blake."

Dr. Blake left the room. The girl and Gregory were left alone.

"We have telephoned to the sheriff," she said. "I have had some food prepared for you. Will you come to the dining-room, please?"

Her eagerness had been replaced by a kind of furtiveness. She did not look at Gregory directly. He followed her to the dining-room. Then she disappeared for a moment and reappeared, bearing a tray with dishes on it. Gregory wondered why she did not leave that task to a servant.

"If there is anything else—" she suggested.

"This will be ample," Gregory said.

"As soon as you have finished, a servant will show you to your room," she said. "He will take care of your clothing. You must be uncomfortable."

"I am more comfortable than I was a little bit ago," Gregory smiled.

He looked into her eyes, but there was no answering smile there. Instead there was a questioning expression which puzzled Gregory. Was there something about him which had aroused the girl's suspicion? Or was she suspicious as a matter of course—suspicious of everyone she met? The latter conclusion seemed more likely.

"Mr. Ramsdell has a beautiful home," he said.

"Yes, it is beautiful," she assented.

"He has not lived here long?" he suggested. "I read that he had lately retired from business."

"He came here just recently," she said. "His health is not good. He has trouble with his heart. It is not serious trouble, but his doctors told him he must rest if he expected to live long."

Gregory looked at his plate. There was the hint of a grim smile at the corners of his mouth.

"You do not find it lonely here after the full life you must have lived with Mr. Ramsdell in New York?" he shot out.

FOR a moment the girl did not speak. Gregory was aware that she was standing at his left, a little behind him. He could feel her eyes upon him. He looked around. She was regarding him with startled eyes. It was not strange, he said to himself, that her eyes should register so many changing emotions. She must be living in constant fear.

"I did not live with Mr. Ramsdell in New York," she said in a low voice. "I came to him here only a week ago. He has never married, and he had lost

track of his relatives. When his health failed, he began to be lonely, and he had a search made for them. Detectives found me in Chicago."

"Ah," said Gregory, "that was romantic, wasn't it? I recall now that I saw something in the newspapers about it."

"Yes," the girl said faintly. "Mr. Ramsdell, rather surprisingly for one who had consistently avoided publicity, gave the story to the newspapers."

Gregory had finished his meal. He rose and faced the girl. He saw her lips tighten as if she braced herself for something.

"And you," he said, "did you want anything printed about it, Miss Ramsdell?"

The girl's smooth cheeks paled. In spite of herself, her lips trembled a little.

"No," she replied, "I did not want anything printed about it."

"Why?" he asked.

"I suppose it was because I did not care for publicity," she answered. She searched his face for half a minute, and then she turned away. "Good night, Mr. Gregory," she added. "I'll send a servant to show you to your room."

When he had removed his damp clothing and handed it over to the servant, Gregory got into the pajamas which the man had laid out for him. He lighted a cigarette and sat down by the open window. The storm had passed while he had been in the house. The clouds were sailing swiftly into the south leaving a clear, sparkling sky.

"She's very pretty, very clever," he told himself.

He puffed awhile, and then he added:

"I'm hanged if her eyes don't seem honest. They must be lovely eyes if she ever smiles."

CHAPTER II

A Girl in Tears

GREGORY was awakened next morning by a knock on his door. He opened his eyes to find the sun streaming across his bed. When he opened the door, he found a servant there with his clothing. While he slept, it had been cleaned and pressed.

He dressed and went downstairs. He found that it was nine o'clock. He had slept long and soundly after his experience in the night.

He went out on the porch. Ramsdell was sitting there. He invited Gregory to take a chair.

"We are expecting the sheriff any minute," Ramsdell said. "I trust we will be able to recover your car for you. You have no suspicion who the men who held you up were?"

"None in the world," Gregory answered. "It's all a mystery to me."

"You will want to wait here so that you will be on the ground, if the sheriff should make a capture," Ramsdell said. "I should be glad to have you for my guest."

"That is very kind of you," Gregory returned. "If I am not intruding—"

"Not at all," Ramsdell said. "My niece and I are here alone. I am not well. I don't get around at all, but Helen does. She will be glad to show you the country."

"Thank you," Gregory said.

"How does your head feel?" Ramsdell asked.

"Oh, it aches a little," Gregory answered. "Nothing to complain about, however, all things considered."

THE sheriff arrived just as they were finishing breakfast.

"There's a car in the ditch, right side up, though, about a mile down the road," he announced. "I s'pose it's your car, Mr. Gregory."

"Helen," Ramsdell called, "please phone Billington to come over here. I want him to go with the sheriff and Mr. Gregory to bring back Mr. Gregory's car."

The girl complied, and in a few minutes Billington, who, Gregory learned while they waited, was foreman on the farm, came over. They set off and in a few minutes came to the car in the ditch. It proved to be Gregory's. It was not damaged. Apparently the men had ridden thus far in it and had then abandoned it.

Gregory and Billington got into the

car, and Gregory turned it about. The sheriff set off to make inquiries along the road as to whether anyone had seen strangers in the neighborhood the night before. Gregory and Billington started back to the Ramsdell home.

Gregory had to tell Billington the story of the hold-up all over again. Billington cursed the hold-up men fluently.

"I'd like to lay my hands on them for a minute," he said. "I'd break 'em in two."

He looked as if he were capable of that. He was a big, broad-shouldered, rawboned man, all muscle and sinew.

"You've come to the right place to get doctored up," he went on. "Ramsdell is about as good an old sport as a city man can be. I guess he's pretty sick, though. In spite of that, he don't complain none. He's game, all right."

"His niece appears to be a competent young woman," Gregory suggested.

"You could swear to that and not be arrested for perjury," Billington said. "The old man thinks a heap of her, though she's only been here a little while. I guess Ramsdell was sufficient to hisself till he got sick. Then he had this here niece looked up. She come to live with him. He wont last so very many years, and then she will come into enough money to plant a ten-acre lot."

"She doesn't look like a girl who cared a great deal for money or show," Gregory hinted.

"She don't," Billington declared. "When the detectives that Ramsdell hired found her, she was workin' for her livin' as a stenographer in Chicago. She looks like she could make her own way, don't she? I'll say she does.

"Why, she's just as plain as my woman is. She comes over to see my woman every once in a while—runs in just like a neighbor. About the prettiest girl you ever set eyes on, aint she? But them eyes of hers troubles my woman considerable. I've noticed them myself, though I aint much of a hand to notice women as a rule. When Miss Ramsdell thinks nobody is lookin', her eyes gets full of sadness. You'd think she had somethin' to worry about instead o' bein' in a way to be fixed for life. My woman thinks she has had a secret love-affair, but that'd be a woman's guess. *I* don't believe Miss Ramsdell is the kind of girl to be worryin' about no man. If a man had throwed her down, I'd bet she'd hold up her head, and nobody'd ever guess the difference."

"She looks it," Gregory said.

When they reached the house, Billington opened the big garage, and Gregory ran his car inside.

"If you get any track of them hold-up men, you just count me in to help you run 'em down," the farmer said. "I'd enjoy a little excitement."

Gregory looked him over. There was an air of simplicity and strength about him that Gregory liked.

"All right," he said. "I may need you."

"Hope you do," said Billington, and he left.

GREGORY went around to the front of the house and entered it, intending to go to his room. As he started up the stairs, he was arrested by the sound of voices in the library. He stopped. At first the voices were low. He could distinguish nothing. He did not want to be an eavesdropper, but he had set himself to solve a mystery, and he felt that his action was warranted by the situation. After a moment he heard Ramsdell say quite clearly:

"But I want you to be happy, my dear. I have a good deal to make amends for. I have been blind all my life. I got my sight only when I came here and was alone. The past unrolled itself to me. I began to see things in their true light. I began to appreciate values I had never known about before.

"That was why I had you brought here. I want to make you happy. I must make you happy. I am growing old, and I want to die peacefully."

Gregory backed toward the door. There was nothing in this confession of an old man's loneliness which could help him. He had no wish to listen to so intimate a conversation.

"But you must give me time," the girl said. "You know, I have never been used to wealth. You've known me only a little while. I may disappoint

you yet. I don't want you to become too attached to me—to depend upon me too much. I—I may be unworthy."

"I have known a great many men and women in my life," Ramsdell rejoined. "I haven't made many mistakes in reading character. I know you are a good girl, Helen. Just take time to adjust yourself, and everything will be all right. . . . . After a while, when you feel like it, I want you to tell me about how my brother—how he lived and how he died."

"Yes, after a while," the girl said.

Gregory backed out of the door and closed it softly. He was a little bewildered. The girl's voice had been honest and kind. Either she was a superb actress or else there were complexities within complexities here.

HE did not see the girl again that day. In the afternoon Doctor Blake came and looked at his wound. He said it was doing very nicely.

"You are a strong man, Mr. Gregory," he said.

"I've always taken care of myself," Gregory smiled.

Ramsdell had been sitting across the room from them, watching the Doctor work. Gregory looked up to find Ramsdell's contemplative eyes on him. Something which roused fresh interest in Gregory seemed to be passing through the old man's mind.

"Have you any relatives in the East, Mr. Gregory?" he asked when the Doctor had left.

"I have no relatives anywhere," Gregory answered.

"Where did you study law?" the old man asked.

Gregory told him.

"Perhaps you had to work for what you have?" the old man suggested.

"Yes, I was poor enough to begin with," Gregory said carelessly.

"So was I," Ramsdell said. "I like to see a man make his own way."

He looked out of the window near which he was sitting, and Gregory studied his face. Gregory judged it had been a hard face till sickness had lined it and regret had softened it. If the newspapers were to be believed, Ramsdell had been a merciless man of business—more like the fictional rich American than any man Gregory had ever known in real life. He had had the brains to take what he wanted, and he had taken it ruthlessly.

But he had broken—or was rapidly breaking—now. He had disclosed that by what he had said to the girl.

"I am troubled about my niece," Ramsdell said after a moment. "She has been poor too. I thought when she came to luxury that she would be very happy. I can't make happiness for myself; it's too late for that. And so I selfishly thought I would borrow some of hers. She thinks I am not thinking of myself, but I am. I lie awake a good deal at night. I wish she would smile; I wish she would learn to laugh. I hope you will be my guest for a while, Mr. Gregory. Perhaps the companionship of a man younger than myself would help to make Helen more like what I know she really is."

Gregory flushed. He had not come here to help Helen. He had come to expose her. He began to think that he should do that now, but something seemed to stay him. It went against the grain to make war on a helpless woman, especially a woman with that haunted look in her eyes.

"I read in a newspaper how you had found your niece," Gregory said. "It was quite romantic."

"I was responsible for the newspaper story," Ramsdell said. "I informed the man I hired to find my relatives that I didn't want any publicity, but I changed my mind about it. I said to myself that, since I had done most things secretly, I would do this thing openly. I think I wanted the world to know—my world—that I was not altogether a wolf."

"I see," Gregory assented. "I suppose you knew the man you hired to find Miss Ramsdell."

"Very well. I hired him a good many times in the past. He is not one of your ordinary uncouth detectives; he is a very able man. I trusted him implicitly. I had befriended him in the past, and I knew he would do his work well. He did."

"He did indeed," Gregory said with a thin smile.

THE girl seemed to avoid him. At dinner that evening Ramsdell said she had a headache. In her absence Ramsdell was listless and tired. As soon as the meal was finished, he excused himself and left Gregory to his own devices.

Gregory left the house and walked down a crossroad to the lake. He sat on a log for half an hour, trying to decide upon some plan of action. His duty seemed clear. His plan had been definite enough when he had read in the newspapers that Ramsdell had taken his "niece" into his household. But he could not get the troubled look in the girl's eyes out of his mind. She possibly was honest, though appearances were so much against her.

"I'll go slow," he resolved as he rose to return to the house. "There's time enough. I'll give her a chance."

As he crossed the lawn toward the house under the big trees, he saw no lights. He supposed everyone had gone to bed. When he had left the lake, his watch had shown ten o'clock.

He was on the porch before he realized that the girl was sitting there. He saw, before she straightened up, that she had been huddled in a big chair with her face buried in her arms. As she lifted her head, Gregory perceived, dimly in the starlight, that there were tears in her eyes and on her cheeks. She had been crying unrestrainedly. She got to her feet unsteadily.

"Oh!" she whispered, like one caught in something to be ashamed of.

Gregory felt sorry for her then. He could not help being sorry for so beautiful a woman in such evident distress.

"Pardon me," he said. "I didn't see you sitting there."

He bowed and was about to pass her. She suddenly put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Wait," she said in a stifled voice.

Gregory stopped.

"You—you didn't come here to find out something about me, did you?" she asked.

Gregory stared at her. Her question was a difficult one for him. He did not want to lie to her; he even did not want to evade her. Her attitude was one of moving appeal.

"What is there to find out about you, Miss Ramsdell?" he questioned gently.

She took a deep, trembling breath.

"Have you ever seen Mr. Ramsdell before?" she asked. "Did he bring you here?"

"I have never seen him before. He did not bring me here."

"He didn't bring you here to—to spy on me?"

"He didn't bring me here at all."

She searched his face with her tear-drenched eyes.

"Do you mean me harm?" she asked.

"I do not mean you any harm," he said. "I would help you if I could."

She sank back into her chair and dropped her head on her breast.

"You cannot help me," she said. "Please, oh, please, just leave me alone."

For a moment Gregory stood looking down at her. Then he turned into the house and mounted the stairs. He would have liked to try to comfort her, but in the circumstances, he could not do that. He was greatly puzzled, but he seemed to have been caught in a web which the girl had become entangled in before him.

CHAPTER III

A Meeting

NEXT morning, while Ramsdell, Gregory and Helen were sitting on the porch, a car stopped in the road at the end of the gravel walk.

"Here comes Daly now," Ramsdell said.

Gregory felt the girl turn her eyes on him quickly and then look away. He knew there had been a question in her eyes. She had come down to breakfast that morning with the evident determination of avoiding Gregory no longer. Through the meal she had talked to Gregory and Ramsdell on ordinary topics. She seemed to wish to erase from Gregory's mind the recollection of her semicollapse of the night before. Gregory had grudgingly to admire her courage.

A man of perhaps forty-five descended from the car. He was well-dressed and well-groomed, and he

moved alertly up the path, glancing from side to side with observant eyes.

Before he reached the porch, Gregory looked full at the girl. She had her gaze fixed on Daly. Gregory saw that her lips were slightly parted, and then her eyes were wide. There was an air of expectancy about her.

As Daly came to the steps, Gregory shot a look at him. He was looking at the girl with a faint, accusing frown between his eyes. The girl sank back in her chair. Gregory perceived that Daly's glance had been telegraphic. Daly seemed to convey to her his wish that she show no agitation at his arrival.

"Good morning, Mr. Ramsdell, and Miss Ramsdell," Daly said, taking off his hat. "I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting along. Your rheumatism was pretty bad when I was here last, Mr. Ramsdell. Better, I hope."

"A little better," Ramsdell assented. "This is Mr. Gregory, Mr. Daly."

GREGORY was aware that Daly's body stiffened a little. He acted as if facing Gregory was something of an ordeal, but he appeared to have nerve and self-control. He turned and offered his hand.

The two men looked into each other's eyes. The gaze of each was questioning. Gregory observed a hardening of the other man's mouth. It was the only sign he now gave that he was concerned about Gregory's presence in the Ramsdell household. Their hands fell apart.

"Sit down, Daly," Ramsdell said.

Daly took a chair. He was sitting a little forward of Gregory. He held his hat in his hand. While he talked to Ramsdell, Gregory observed him. From the first there had been something familiar in his voice; now Gregory saw that there was a scar on the forefinger of his right hand; and he had two gold teeth. He was one of the men who had held Gregory up in the road!

Gregory was not surprised. He had figured before now that the men who had held him up were somehow leagued with the girl. The hold-up, he had decided, had not been an ordinary one. The two men had had their own reasons for attacking him. What those reasons were Gregory could not even guess as yet. He believed that Daly had come here this morning to face him so that he might ascertain if Gregory was suspicious of him. Gregory was sure the theft of his money had been more a blind than anything else.

Presently Daly turned round in his chair and faced Gregory.

"Spending your vacation here, are you, Mr. Gregory?" he asked suavely.

"Yes," Gregory said.

"It's a pleasant place," Daly said.

"Very," Gregory agreed.

"Come far?"

"From Cincinnati."

"Professional man, I suppose."

"Lawyer," said Gregory.

A shadow of alarm flitted across Daly's face. He seemed about to put another question, and then to think better of it. After a while he rose.

"I must be moving along," he said. "I'll see you again, Mr. Ramsdell."

They bade him good-by, and he went back to his car. Gregory let him go, though his legal sense told him that the proper move would be to detain him. He felt, however, that he was standing at the fringe of events, so far. If the girl had been the adventuress her actions indicated, he would have had no hesitation in denouncing the detective; but the innate honesty and sincerity which he thought he had found in the girl held him back. There was time enough, he told himself again.

AS Daly drove away, Gregory decided to give the girl a chance to trust him. He knew she was depressed, and he believed she was uncertain what to do. Her questions of the night before showed that she suspected he had an ulterior purpose in coming here. He rose.

"I think I'll go for a ride," he said. "Can't I persuade you to accompany me, Miss Ramsdell?"

He looked down at her. She found a challenge in his eyes. In keeping with what seemed her new resolve not to avoid him, she accepted the challenge.

"I'll be glad to go," she answered.

He brought his car around and helped her into it.

"Any particular direction?" Gregory asked.

"No," she replied.

He turned the car and went along the main road for a quarter of a mile. That brought them to a road which led to the lake. He turned into it. In ten minutes he stopped the car on the brow of a hill which led down to the water. For a moment they sat in silence.

"Miss Ramsdell," Gregory said abruptly, "who is Daly?"

"A private detective," she answered.

"The man who discovered you?" he said.

"How did you know that?"

"Mr. Ramsdell told me. It's a very interesting story, Miss Ramsdell. I don't want to seem inquisitive, but how did Daly locate you?"

The girl's hand fluttered up to her hair, which the breeze was stirring. Gregory saw that she had turned white.

"I would rather not talk about that," she said in a low voice.

"You act as if you were in trouble," he said a bit sternly. "I suppose, however, you would refuse a proffer of aid on my part."

"I would refuse it," she said.

"Yet you need aid."

She turned on him. Her eyes had hardened. She seemed to be steeling herself against him.

"There is only one way you can aid me," she said. "That is by leaving me alone. Do not think me ungrateful. I suppose you are a strong man in your own world. I imagine you are used to meeting difficult situations; but believe me, this is a situation too difficult even for you. If you will only not try to solve what you think is a mystery, I will be very grateful to you."

"You want me to believe you are a good woman, don't you?" he demanded.

Again that look of hard determination came into her eyes.

"I cannot ask you to believe anything about me," she answered. "Will you take me home, please?"

HE turned the car without a word and started back. Doubt had entered his heart. He tried to force himself to believe that the girl was merely clever. She wore a mask of innocence to cover her duplicity. Daly was a crook, and she was working with him.

Well, he couldn't very well fight a woman, no matter what she was. For some reason or other Daly and a companion had attacked him. Daly was on the ground. He too was suspicious of Gregory. Gregory determined to give Mr. Daly all the chance in the world to come to close grips with him again.

After luncheon he went over to the tenant-house, where Billington lived. The foreman was smoking his after-dinner pipe on the back porch.

"I had a notion I would go down to the beach and do a little shooting this afternoon," Gregory said. "I wondered if you could loan me a revolver."

"Sure, I will," Billington said.

He went into the house and returned with an automatic in his hand. Gregory took it and put it into his pocket.

He saw the girl again that day only at dinner. Afer dinner he and Ramsdell sat on the porch for half an hour, talking. Then Ramsdell excused himself and took his rheumatism to bed.

Gregory waited for a few minutes in the hope that the girl would come out, but she did not. He was both disappointed and relieved. He was discovering, in spite of her reticence and his own suspicion, that he liked to be with her, but he was well satisfied that there should be no further talk between them for a while.

Except for the sounds the crickets and far-away frogs made, the night silence was unbroken. The trees stood motionless. The sky was choked with stars and star-dust. There was no moon.

Gregory stepped down from the porch and walked along the road. He had come to the conclusion that for some reason or other Daly or his companion was watching the Ramsdell house. That seemed to him to be borne out by the fact of the hold-up. He could not decide whether Daly had mistaken him for some one else whom he expected to visit Ramsdell, but that seemed likely. Daly seemed to be waiting for some sort of climax. Gregory had made up his mind to give the two

men a chance to force the climax if they considered it was to be forced through him.

When he had gone to his room for a moment after dinner, he had dropped Billington's pistol into a side pocket of his coat. His hand grasped the butt of it now.

PRESENTLY he came to the lake road and started down that. When he had walked a short distance, he came to a clump of trees—what remained of an ancient wood. The trees threw the road into darkness. He glanced about him but could see nothing.

He passed the grove and followed the road again under the starlight. He walked slowly to the top of the hill and stood looking down at the lake. He fell to brooding about the girl. He wished he had met her in other circumstances. He was beginning to feel a good deal of interest in her, in spite of the appearances against her. She was very pretty. And yet—

He shrugged his shoulders and turned about to start for the Ramsdell home. Then he stopped, and his hand went clutching at the automatic in his pocket. Down the road, just this side of the clump of trees, a flitting figure had appeared for a moment. Though the light was poor, he knew it to be the figure of a man. No farm animal could have moved with that precision.

Gregory hesitated. He wondered if the man had seen him and was following him. He swiftly decided against that. The man had come from the other direction. Undoubtedly he was headed for the beach, and he was keeping himself out of sight as much as possible.

Gregory ran down the hill to the beach. There was no one in sight. He sped along the beach for a hundred feet and came to a break in the hill. He crept into this and found himself hidden by overhanging branches. Five minutes passed, while he stood with his hand on his gun.

Then there was the noise of a breaking branch above him. Silence again! Gregory moved five feet to his left and crept further beneath the undergrowth. A twig nearer to him snapped.

"Damnation!" said a man's voice.

The darkness was riven by a shaft of light from an electric pocket-torch. Gregory crouched lower. The beam failed to search him out. The light died as suddenly as it had come. Then a man, descending the path soft-footedly, stopped near him. Gregory, peering, saw that he had his coat-collar turned up about his throat and a cap pulled over his eyes.

The man stood still a moment, listening intently. Gregory scarcely dared breathe. The man's listening seemed to satisfy him, and he crept to the beach. He looked to east and west, and then he sat down on a log. Every once in a while he looked along the beach again with ill-concealed impatience.

Presently he put a cigarette between his lips and struck a match. The little flame flared up between his cupped hands, lighting his face. It was a heavy-jawed, villainous face, Gregory saw. He had a notion that this was Daly's companion, but he could not be sure. He had had only a fleeting glimpse of him on the night of the hold-up.

FOR a moment Gregory was undecided what to do. If he had been sure of his man, he might have covered him with his gun and emerged from his hiding-place. There were a few questions he would have liked to put to him. He knew that force was what would count with this man. He was a common thug, apparently. Daly was doubtless the brains of the association.

Five minutes more passed. Gregory was growing cramped from his position. He decided he would show himself. If the man made a hostile move, he could still cover him with his gun. If he made none, Gregory could return to the house.

He stood up, making no sound. Almost simultaneously the man rose from his log. He took half a dozen steps along the beach. Gregory heard him grumble to himself.

Gregory peered above the tops of the bushes. The man had stopped and was looking at another person who was coming along the beach. Gregory tol-

lowed his gaze, and then he quickly hid himself again. The second person came up to where the man was standing.

"It's about time you come," the man said.

"I am here now," Helen Ramsdell replied.

CHAPTER IV

A Plea for Help

"WELL, how about the will?" the thug asked. "Has Ramsdell done anything about it yet?"

"No, he has done nothing."

"And I suppose," the thug said spitefully, "that you haven't done anything, either. Aint you clever, though!"

"What do you wish me to do?" the girl asked. "I can't force Mr. Ramsdell to make his will."

"You could lead him on, if you wanted to. Can't you be smooth? I'm not goin' to wait a year or two. Besides, the newspaper dope that Ramsdell give out is liable to put somebody wise. Say, who is this Gregory that's stoppin' up at the house?"

"You know as much about him as I do," Helen answered. "You attacked him the other night."

"Is he wise to that?" the thug asked in some alarm.

"How could he be? Why, did you attack him?"

"We been laying for somebody to go to the house to make the will. We aint taking any chances on you, you understand. We thought when we saw a machine coming that it might be a lawyer. This Gregory is a lawyer, Daly says. We thought he might have been to the house to make the old man's will. We figured he'd have it on him if he had drawed it up. We wanted to be sure. If he hadn't got fresh, he wouldn't have been hurt. He aint Ramsdell's reg'lar lawyer, is he?"

"No; he came to Mr. Ramsdell's quite by chance. He had to have help after you had hurt him. Mr. Ramsdell's regular lawyer is away on his vacation."

"Well, have you made up to this Gregory guy at all? If he's a lawyer, you could get him to draw the will."

"I haven't 'made up' to him," the girl flared out. "I don't 'make up' to men."

"You'll do well to make up to this one," the thug said angrily. "You just make that your business beginning tomorrow. You get that Gregory guy on your staff. You understand? If you want to, you can lead him around by the nose. You're pretty enough. And if he's a lawyer and clever, he can get the old boy to make his will without the old boy knowin' he has been piloted. We'll just leave it like that. Get busy and don't forget to let me know when the will is made. Scatter along now."

Gregory saw the girl turn swiftly and hasten away along the beach. The thug waited till she was out of sight. Then he lighted another cigarette and started in the direction in which she had gone.

GREGORY stepped from his place of concealment. Ahead of him he could see the thug tramping along. Presently he passed around a bluff. Gregory ran after him. His feet made no noise in the sand. When he came to the bluff, he again saw the man just ahead of him. He followed, keeping as close to the bank as possible.

They went about a quarter of a mile in this fashion, and then the man suddenly disappeared. Gregory stopped and waited. Five minutes passed, and the man did not reappear. Gregory ran to the place at which he had turned from the beach. Here he discovered a path running to the top of the hill. He clambered up it. He reached the top in time to see an automobile starting down the road. He could make out two men in the front seat.

The machine sped away, leaving Gregory standing in the darkness. He swore softly under his breath. For a while he stood there, thinking deeply. He did not know why he had a shred of faith in the girl, but he was forced to admit he had it. That being so, he would have to begin at the other end of the skein to untangle it. He would have to work backward through Daly and his accomplice.

He hastened back to the house. As he entered the front door, the girl came along the hall. Her eyes were very bright in her pale face.

"Has Mr. Ramsdell retired?" Gregory asked.

"No," she answered; "he is in the library."

"I want to see him for just a moment," Gregory said, and he moved to pass her.

She put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Has anything happened, Mr. Gregory?" she asked.

"Why?" he demanded.

"You seem—well, not agitated exactly, but hurried."

"Nothing has happened to me," Gregory said.

He disengaged himself gently and went to the library. Ramsdell laid down the book he had been idly glancing through.

"Mr. Ramsdell," Gregory said, "can you tell me where Daly lives? I have a little business that I want him to attend to for me."

"He lives in Cleveland," Ramsdell answered. "If you will just open the top left-hand drawer in that desk, you'll find his card."

Gregory pulled out the drawer and found the card. It bore Daly's office address, and on it was penciled a street-number.

"This is his home-address penciled here?" Gregory asked.

"Yes," Ramsdell nodded.

"I must drive to Cleveland to-night," Gregory said. "I shall take the liberty of coming back, if you don't mind."

"Why, yes, of course," Ramsdell assented absently.

Gregory started to turn away. As he did so, he saw Ramsdell's hand begin to flutter. He half rose in his chair and then settled back. His breathing was labored. Gregory crossed to him swiftly.

"Are you ill, Mr. Ramsdell?" he asked.

"I—I have had difficulty with my breathing to-night," Ramsdell answered feebly. "That's why I didn't go to bed—couldn't lie down. Didn't want to alarm Helen. I—"

HE slipped forward in the big chair, his eyes slowly closing. His face was pale and drawn. Gregory stood over him, feeling for his pulse with unaccustomed finger-tips. He found it, but its beat was slow and heavy.

Gregory ran to the door. Helen was standing just inside the front screen-door.

"Miss Ramsdell!" he called quietly.

She wheeled about, and he saw that she was trembling.

"Will you come to the library, please?" he asked.

She came slowly along the hall. He saw that she feared he had discovered something about her and had disclosed it to Ramsdell.

"Mr. Ramsdell is ill," he said. "Don't be alarmed. I think it is nothing more than an attack of faintness. Please send a servant and call Dr. Blake."

Helen's concern for herself vanished. She became at once competent, solicitous. She pressed a button in the wall, and a manservant appeared. Then she turned into another room, and Gregory heard her calling a number.

With the help of the servant Gregory carried Ramsdell to his own room and put him down on the bed. He loosened the old man's clothing while the servant poured some liquid from a bottle into a glass of water. Ramsdell was reviving, and the man got him to drink the medicine.

"I'm all right," Ramsdell murmured gamely. "Just a little attack. I've had 'em before. Dr. Blake better come over."

"Miss Ramsdell is telephoning for him," Gregory said.

"That's all right," Ramsdell said in a stronger voice. "Tell Helen not to be frightened. The medicine is making me easier. Get me undressed, Albert."

As Gregory left the room, he came face to face with Helen. She was as white, in her reaction, as Ramsdell himself.

"Is he dying?" she whispered.

"Oh, no," Gregory assured her. "He's feeling better. You got the Doctor?"

"Yes; he's coming right over." She rapped on the door. "Tell me when I can come in, Albert," she said.

Gregory walked out to the hall while she remained outside the door. In a few minutes he heard her enter Ramsdell's room; and then the Doctor's car

stopped outside. Gregory waited till he came out.

"Is he seriously ill?" he asked.

"No," the Doctor answered. "But, like a good many Americans, he has worn himself out. His heart is weakened, but it has a long time of service left in it, if he will take care of himself."

"You don't think he might die suddenly—soon?" Gregory asked.

"I'm not looking for that," the Doctor answered. "How's your head?"

"Feels normal," Gregory answered. "I've got to make a little trip at once. Can't you take this bandage off?"

"Yes. I can put on a dressing and fasten it with adhesive strips. It wont show much if you wear a soft hat or a cap."

WHEN he had finished the dressing and had gone, the servant came out of Ramsdell's room.

"Mr. Ramsdell wishes to see you," he said.

Gregory entered the bedroom. The old man was propped up on pillows. A little color had come into his face.

"You're looking better," Gregory said. "How do you feel?"

"Rather weak," Ramsdell answered. "Otherwise all right. I see the Doctor has been fixing you up too. You'll feel better to make your trip."

The girl had been standing at the foot of the bed. At Ramsdell's remark, Gregory heard her take her breath sharply.

"Are you going away?" she asked.

"For a few hours," he answered. "I'll be back early in the morning. Mr. Ramsdell has been good enough to say I might return."

"You are going to-night?" she asked. "Your business must be urgent."

Gregory felt that it would be unwise to let her know that he was going to seek Daly. He had failed to caution Ramsdell, however.

"May I speak to Mr. Ramsdell alone for a moment?" he asked.

She withdrew slowly, her eyes on his face.

"I would rather you said nothing about why I am going away, Mr. Ramsdell," Gregory said. "I shouldn't like to have it known that I want to see Daly."

"I sha'n't mention it," Ramsdell said.

There was a moment of silence. Ramsdell lay with his eyes closed, as if he were thinking deeply.

"Mr. Gregory," he asked suddenly, "will you draw up my will for me?"

Gregory was taken aback. Had the girl been heartless enough to suggest this to the old man while he lay ill? It was a shocking thought.

"Oh, no, I can't do that," he said.

Ramsdell looked at him in surprise.

"Why can't you?" he asked. "You're an attorney."

"Oh, yes," Gregory assented, "but haven't you an attorney of your own? Drawing up a will is a rather intimate piece of business."

"Oh, yes, I have a lawyer, but he's up in the Maine woods just now—inaccessible by wire or mail. I feel that I want to get this off my mind. I'll feel easier when I know that everything is arranged so that my niece will get what I have. I don't like these recurring attacks of faintness. Dr. Blake reassures me, but you never can tell."

"Did Miss Ramsdell suggest this just now?" Gregory asked.

AT the bitterness in his tone, Ramsdell looked at him again.

"Why, no," Ramsdell said. "Helen has never mentioned that subject. She wouldn't, my dear boy. The thought of money has never entered her head, I'll wager. She's not mercenary. No, I've been thinking about it ever since you came."

"The Doctor tells me you are in no danger, Mr. Ramsdell," Gregory said. "You are no more likely to die than I am just at present. There is really no hurry about the will. Let's wait a day or so. When you get up, we'll talk it over."

"Very well," Ramsdell said. "Just send Albert in, will you? I think I'll sleep."

Gregory left the room and sent the servant there. Helen met him in the hall.

"Mr. Gregory," she said, "will you do me a favor—a very great favor?"

"What is it?" he asked.

She lifted her wan face to his, and there was a plea in her eyes.

"Will you draw my uncle's will for him?"

"Your uncle has just made the same request," he said coldly.

"Oh!" Her hand went to her heart. "Did he say what the will was to contain?"

"He intends to leave all his property to you."

"And you will draw up the will?" she asked eagerly.

"Not right away. I told him I would talk to him about it in a day or so."

"Why can't you do it at once?"

"Miss Ramsdell," Gregory said with a touch of scorn in his voice, "I don't understand you at all. Why are you so anxious to have that will drawn? Why can't you be the honest woman you seem to be."

"Honest?" she murmured.

"Yes, honest. Good Lord! You're a good woman, aren't you?" There was a plea in his voice now. "You must be a good woman. There's goodness in your eyes, in your voice, in every natural thing you do. . . . And yet what are you doing in this house?"

SHE swayed a little and leaned against the wall.

"Don't question me," she whispered. "Can't you help a woman in distress without making her answerable to you? Wont you draw up that will? Wont you do it to-day?"

"No, I will not."

"In a day or so then? Please!"

"A good many things may happen in a day or so," he said.

He moved toward the door.

"Where are you going to-night?" she asked.

"I can't tell you that," he replied.

"Is it on an errand that concerns me?"

"I can't answer your questions, Miss Ramsdell," he said gently.

"Please don't go," she breathed. "I don't want you to go. I am afraid. I am afraid you are going to do something that will mean disaster for me. Please don't go."

"If I stay, will you trust me?" he asked.

"I can't," she said. "I can't."

"I must go, then," he said. "I am sorry. I don't know why, but I am bitterly sorry for you, Miss Ramsdell."

He passed through the door and went down the steps. Looking back as he turned the corner of the house, he saw the girl staring after him.

"If I find Daly this time, I'll choke the truth out of him," he told himself savagely as he got out his car.

CHAPTER V

A Precious Document

GREGORY had the road to the city to himself. It was paved most of the way, and he let his car out. He came to the suburbs a little after one o'clock.

He drove slowly toward the downtown section till he came to a garage. He ran his car into this and had it put away. In the corner he noticed a booth telephone. Getting permission to use it, he called Daly's house-number after finding it in the book. He had to wait five minutes and ask the sleepy central to call him again before there was an answer. That answer was in a woman's voice.

"Is Mr. Daly there?" Gregory asked.

"Not just now. He telephoned me an hour ago that he would be home before long. I expect him any minute. Is it Mr. Meeker?"

"No," Gregory answered. "I had some important business to take up with Mr. Daly. Will he be at his office in the morning?"

"I suppose so, though he didn't say."

"Very well," Gregory said, and he hung up.

He took a street-car downtown and remained at a hotel till five o'clock. At a little after six he was loitering in the vicinity of Daly's home.

Half an hour later Daly drove out of the yard and headed for town. Gregory waited till he was out of sight, and then he went up on the porch and rang the bell. A woman answered the ring.

"Oh," she said when she opened the door, "I thought it was Mr. Meeker."

"May I see Mr. Daly?" Gregory asked.

"He has just left," the woman answered.

"Gone to his office?"

"Yes."

"May I use his phone?"

"Certainly. Come in."

Gregory entered, and the woman led him into a sitting-room where there was a telephone.

"He's hardly had time to reach his office," the woman said. "You had better wait a few minutes."

"Very well," Gregory said. "Do you know whether Mr. Daly is very busy?"

"I can't say, I'm sure," the woman answered. "I'm only his housekeeper. I don't know anything about his business affairs."

AS she finished, there was a patter of little feet on the stairs. In a moment a boy of six or seven stood in the doorway.

"Why, Harry," the woman said, "I didn't give you permission to get up and come downstairs."

"I know you didn't," the boy said hardily. "But I want my breakfast."

"You'll have it right away," the woman said, and she picked him up in her arms and bore him away.

Gregory waited half an hour. He heard the woman and the boy talking in the room adjoining the one in which he sat. He rose softly and peered through the curtains which separated the two rooms. The woman and the boy were seated at a table, eating their breakfasts.

Gregory took up the phone and called Daly's office number. There was no answer. He went to the curtains and pushed one of them aside.

"Apparently Mr. Daly hasn't arrived at his office," he said. "I'll wait a few minutes longer if I may."

"Certainly," the woman said.

Gregory had observed that the meal was not half finished. He knew he could not wait much longer. Daly was expecting Meeker—who might arrive at any minute. He was sure that some word for Meeker was waiting there. He did not believe Daly would trust a verbal message to a third person.

He observed a desk in a corner. It was open, and there were papers scattered on it. He walked over to it and hunted among the papers. He found an envelope marked *"Mr. Meeker. Personal."*

Gregory lifted his head and listened for a moment. The boy was talking to the woman in the other room. Gregory picked up a paper-cutter and carefully opened the flap of the envelope. A sheet of paper which he drew out held this:

At office all day. Home to-night. Rush things. Afraid H. is losing her nerve. Phone me night or day.

He put the paper back into the envelope and sealed it with mucilage from a bottle on the desk. As he finished, he heard the woman push her chair back from the table. He went to the curtains again and opened them.

"I wont wait any longer," he said. "I have no doubt Mr. Daly is at his office. I'll go there. . . . . Is Mr. Meeker expected here to-day?"

"Mr. Daly said he would call for a letter—or send for it," the woman answered.

Gregory left. He had no wish to see Daly now. Daly was safe for twenty-four hours. Apparently he had turned the active work over to Meeker, the thug whom Helen had met on the beach.

If Meeker was going to rush matters, he would be in the vicinity of the Ramsdell home. Gregory hastened back to the garage and got out his car. His trip back to the Ramsdell home took him two hours. He was well satisfied with what he had learned. He was not working altogether in the dark. His task now was to checkmate any move which Meeker might make.

AS Gregory drove into the yard, he saw the girl come out on the porch. She was waiting there with a look of anxiety on her face when he came back from putting the car away.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"To Cleveland," he answered.

"Whom did you see?"

"No one I knew—no one you knew."

She searched his face.

"You are sure?" she asked.

"Positive."

She passed a hand wearily over her eyes.

"Mr. Gregory," she said, "wont you draw up Mr. Ramsdell's will to-day?"

"I came home to do that very thing," he said grimly.

He had come to that decision as he had driven back. The making of the will seemed to be the event upon which future events depended. He had concluded that Meeker and Daly would not act till the will was made and Helen became an heiress. He had decided to comply with the girl's request and then to prepare for what Daly and Meeker might do.

"Oh, thank you," the girl breathed. "You don't know how happy you make me."

Her relief seemed to spring from such mercenary motives that Gregory was angry. He faced her, his eyes hard.

"See here, Miss Ramsdell," he said, "why does the immediate drawing up of this will mean so much to you? You will be no better off than you were before, till Mr. Ramsdell dies."

"I shall be infinitely better off," she said. "Nothing in the world could mean more to me. And I—I am innocent of any wrong, no matter how appearances may seem against me."

"I have asked you to confide in me."

"I can't. I can't confide in anyone. That is the bitterest part of it. . . . . I'll go and tell Mr. Ramsdell you will do as he asks."

"I prefer to tell Mr. Ramsdell," Gregory said. "Please ring for Albert and ask if Mr. Ramsdell will see me."

THEY went into the house, and the girl rang for the servant. Albert came down the hall, and she instructed him to carry Gregory's request to Ramsdell.

Albert came back in a moment, and said Ramsdell would see Gregory. Gregory went to Ramsdell's room. The old man was sitting up in bed, looking better.

"I have told Miss Ramsdell that I would draw up your will if you wished," Gregory said abruptly.

"Thanks, Gregory," Ramsdell said. "I shall be glad to have it off my mind."

"You are quite sure you wish to leave your fortune to—Miss Ramsdell?" Gregory said.

Ramsdell seemed to accept the question as a sort of legal preface on Gregory's part. He leaned back against his pillow and closed his eyes for a moment. Then he slowly opened them and looked at the lawyer.

"Sit down, Gregory," he said, "and I will tell you just how I feel."

Gregory sat down.

"In my boyhood," Ramsdell began, "I was about as poor as a boy could be. My father was a farmer who never owned a farm. He worked the hard clay land of Michigan on shares. The man he shared with was a pinch-a-penny. He would give my father no assistance in bringing up the land so that it would raise decent crops.

"The virus of hate got into my father's blood. Because one man was mean and narrow, my father came to hate all men. He grew bitter toward his own family even. There were days and days when he did not speak to any of us. My mother died when I was ten years old. My sister was younger than I, my brother older. The brother turned in like a man to help Father all he could on the farm. The sister—only ten years old—did the housework as best she could.

"Some of that virus that was in my father's blood got into my own. As a boy can hate, I hated him. I can see him now—a burly, sour man, his mind and his heart black from thinking of his own troubles. I blamed him then, though, God knows, I don't blame him now.

"I ran away from home. I walked a good many miles till I came to a city. On the way I slept in haystacks and begged food. In the city I sold papers and slept in hallways and over sidewalk gratings. As I grew older, I did everything that came to my hand. When I was eighteen I decided to become rich. I studied and planned, all to that end. I read only those books which I thought would help me. I looked on education as a means to an end. I saved a little money—the foundation of my fortune. How I made the fortune doesn't matter. There are some things about the making of it that are not pleasant to recall.

"A year ago the doctors forced me to

retire from business. I loafed for months, and then I bought this place. Then the call of my blood came to me. I suppose illness broke my spirit a little. I wanted one of my own kin near me in the time I had to live. So Daly found Helen. And I wish to leave her what I have. It's a kind of restitution, Gregory, and it's the best I can do. I see that money is not everything. Life looked pretty bleak to me till Helen came."

"DID you ever hear from your people after you ran away as a boy?" Gregory asked.

"There were two letters," Ramsdell answered huskily. "I wish to God those letters had come only to-day. The recollection of them makes me unhappy. One of the letters was from my brother; one was from my sister. They found my address through the newspapers. As I continued to pile up money, my name got into the papers more and more. Those letters were poorly penciled scrawls, and they contained heart-breaking appeals for aid. My sister and my brother were having a hard struggle. . . . . I tore up the letters, Gregory, and never answered them. I was in my prime then. The money-lust was strong in me. I was proud. I shuddered when I thought of establishing a connection with those people."

"Where did Daly find Miss Ramsdell?" Gregory asked.

"He found her in Chicago, where she was a stenographer. She was my brother's child—his only child. Her father and her mother were both dead. There was one thing I liked about Helen: in spite of what she must have gone through in her girlhood, she was plucky. She had worked in a store and studied stenography at night. She had educated herself as I had done in my boyhood. She is a fine girl, Gregory. Don't you think so?"

Gregory nodded. He rose.

"I'll have Miss Ramsdell bring in a couple of servants for witnesses," he said.

He found Helen in the dining-room.

"You are ready?" she asked.

Gregory looked at her sharply.

"Mr. Ramsdell has just told me his story," he said. "In making you his heiress, he is trying to atone for his hard-heartedness in the past. You understand this is more than the transfer of the property? There is conscience in it."

She assented with a mute inclination of her head.

"Please have two of the servants come to Mr. Ramsdell's room, then," he said.

"May I come too?" she asked.

"It is immaterial to me," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders.

THE drawing-up of the will took only a few minutes. When it was signed and witnessed, Ramsdell said:

"Do you wish to see it, my dear?"

"If I may," the girl answered.

Her eyes ran through the brief recital of Ramsdell's final wishes. Gregory saw that her hand was shaking. She rose and handed the papers to Ramsdell. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She stooped and kissed Ramsdell's cheek. Then she hurried from the room.

"What do you wish done with the will, Mr. Ramsdell?" Gregory said.

"I'll have it put away when I get up," Ramsdell said. "Let Helen take care of it till then."

Gregory left the room with the will in his hand. When he came into the hall, the girl emerged from the library. She glanced quickly at the paper in Gregory's hand.

"Mr. Ramsdell wishes you to take care of the will till he gets up," he said.

The girl extended her hand eagerly, quickly. Gregory placed the will in it. She puzzled him anew. The color had come back to her cheeks. Her breast rose and fell with her rapid breathing. She was lovely. How could greed mask loveliness like this, Gregory bitterly asked himself. How could it associate itself with men like Meeker and Daly?

He took a step toward her and laid his hand on her arm, none too gently.

"Miss Ramsdell," he said, "there is love in that will—love which an old and stricken man is trying to make take the place of past bitterness and hate and suffering, the suffering of a woman even. I hope you realize that."

The color fled from the girl's cheeks. She shut her eyes tightly, as if tears were trying to burn their way between the lids.

"I understand all that," she said.

"You understand all that, and yet—" He paused and withdrew his hand from her arm. "Miss Ramsdell," he broke off, "Mr. Ramsdell had a sister and a brother. You are the daughter of the brother?"

"I am the daughter of the brother."

He stood looking down at her for a moment. Then he broke out angrily:

"That isn't true. Mr. Ramsdell's brother never had a daughter. You are not Mr. Ramsdell's niece. You are not related to him in the remotest way."

The girl recoiled, her big eyes dilated. She turned from him and went along the hall unsteadily. Gregory was sorry he had hurt her. He had not meant to reveal to her that he knew she was an impostor, but he had been carried out of himself. Anger banished his regret the next instant, however; for when the girl turned into the library, he saw that she was pressing the will against her breast as if it were the most precious thing in the world to her.

CHAPTER VI

Confession

GREGORY spent that day in mental and physical unrest. He was sure he had hurried events toward their climax by drawing up Ramsdell's will, and he was filled with a kind of terror as to what part the girl would play in the result. She had assured him that she was innocent of intentional wrong, but he argued that if she were guilty she would protest in just that way. His unrest was increased by the fact that he feared he would be in love with the girl if he met her in other circumstances.

As soon as it was dark, he slipped away from the house and went over to Billington's. Without telling Billington what he expected to happen, he asked the farmer to arm himself and return to the Ramsdell house.

"I'll take a rifle, if it's all the same to you," Billington said. "I can do more execution with it in a minute than I can do with a revolver in a week. Takin' a chicken's head off at a hundred feet is about my speed. . . . . What's up, Mr. Gregory?"

"I don't know, to be frank about it," Gregory answered. "I'm just making some guesses. Maybe there'll be something stirring—maybe nothing. But I want you to watch the Ramsdell house. I may have to leave you for a while. If I do, don't let any harm come to Ramsdell."

"It's been some time since anything has been stirrin' around here," Billington said. "The more the merrier, so far as I'm concerned. You just tell me when to shoot, and I'll shoot as straight as I know how. If you have to leave, I'll shoot on suspicion."

Gregory set off down the road, and Billington followed him. They took up their positions behind two of the big trees. The sun had set behind a bank of clouds before Gregory left the house, and the night had come down heavily. There had been wisps of gray fog in the air, and now it began to roll in like a filmy shroud.

"You expectin' humans or animals?" Billington asked.

"Humans," Gregory said.

He was glad to have the easy-going farmer for a partner in his enterprise. He knew Billington would keep his head, and he imagined he would be a bear in a fight.

The minutes dragged by, and an hour passed. The light in Ramsdell's room was put out. Then one by one the lights in other parts of the house were extinguished. Ten minutes more slipped away. The screened door whined softly as it was opened. Gregory peered from behind his tree. Through the fog he could just make out a hesitating figure on the porch. After a moment the figure descended the steps and cut across the lawn away from Gregory.

"I'm going," he told Billington. "Keep watch."

"All right," Billington said.

AT that Gregory sped along the edge of the road under the trees. He soon discerned the other person ahead

of him. He had supposed it was Helen, and now he was sure. She came to the end of the road and paused at the head of the crossroad. As she looked back, Gregory stopped. The fog and the overhanging trees hid him. The girl, almost running, started down the crossroad.

Gregory crossed the main road and climbed a fence. A little behind the girl, he ran across a field, stooping so that the rail fence between them would shut off her view. He soon came to another fence. He climbed that and entered the patch of woods. He had gone but a short distance when his feet became entangled in running blackberry vines and he fell. He lay still, though the briers scratched his hands and face. He listened, but there was no sound in the night. The girl had sped on down the road toward the lake.

Gregory, of course, could easily guess whither she was bound. She was going to meet Meeker. He supposed the place where they had met the previous night was an agreed rendezvous, and as soon as he was out of the woods, he ran across a field toward the spot where he had hidden himself before. When he came to the top of the hill, he parted the vines and undergrowth and crept through it to his hiding-place. The fog was thick here, and he could see nothing. The only sound was the faint lap of the water on the beach.

Many minutes fled past. He began to worry lest the girl and Meeker had met somewhere else, and then quite suddenly he heard Meeker's voice:

"Are you there, girl?"

"Right here," Helen answered.

"Well, how about it?"

"The will has been made."

"Aw, thank Gawd!"

Meeker's voice was hot with eagerness. Gregory could imagine the glow of cupidity in his eyes.

"Where's the will now?" he asked.

"I have it."

"Oh, say, but you're doin' your work as fine as spun silk. Lemme see it."

"You'll give it back?" the girl questioned.

"Give it back?" Meeker exploded. "Good Lord, do you think I'd keep it? What good would it be in my hands? I sh'd think I would give it back, and you want to hand it to that Gregory guy or Ramsdell as quick as you can. Don't you go holding on to it. Lemme see it."

There was a moment of silence during which Gregory supposed the girl gave the will to Meeker.

"Can't see a thing," Meeker then said. "Wait a minute."

A shaft of light went through the fog. Gregory could see Meeker's hand holding the will, the will itself, and the girl standing within the shaft of orange light. Then the light died.

"All O. K.," said Meeker gleefully. "Here—take it. Don't drop it—don't lose it. It's worth its weight in gold, if it weighed a ton. I'm going."

"Mr. Meeker!"

Helen called out the name anxiously. Meeker's voice came back from down the beach.

"Go on home. That's all for tonight. You'll get word later. Go on now. I'm busy. No time to waste."

"Oh!"

The exclamation was like a sob. Gregory was tempted to step out to the girl and demand an explanation from her, but he knew that would be most unwise. He had got to get back to the house, anyway.

SO far, everything had worked out as he had expected. Just as he had foreseen, Helen had lost no time in letting Meeker know that the will had been made. The next move was up to the thug.

Gregory clambered up the hill and ran back across the field, through the woods and across the second field, and so rejoined Billington.

"Anything happened?" he panted, as he hid behind the tree.

"Not a whisper," Billington answered. "Nothing but fog and silence."

"Be very still," Gregory said. "Some one will come to the house in a minute."

"Who went out?" Billington asked.

"Hush," Gregory warned, for he still had an instinct to protect the girl, to give her a chance if she should eventually deserve it.

In a few minutes she moved like a dim shadow through the fog and went up on the porch and entered the house.

"We'll move up a little closer," Gregory directed. "Don't say anything, no matter what you see. Leave everything to me."

They moved to the shelter of a tree which was directly opposite the corner of the house. As they pressed their bodies against it, Gregory heard the corn in a field beyond the house begin to rustle. Since no breath of air was stirring, he knew that something moved in that corn.

It might of course be a prowling dog, but he was sure it was not. He had been as sure that Meeker would visit this house to-night as he had been sure the girl would meet Meeker. He had reconstructed the plot which Daly and Meeker were working out. They had palmed the girl off on Ramsdell as his niece. The will had been drawn. The girl was an heiress. Daly and Meeker had her in their power somehow.

But Ramsdell might live for a long time. The two men were to profit when the girl profited. And they were not men to wait for their share. Gregory shivered.

"Cold?" Billington asked.

"No," Gregory whispered back. . . . . "Do you hear the rustle of the corn? There's no breeze."

They were silent. Billington listened with bent head. He said nothing, but Gregory saw him shift his rifle from the crook of his left arm. Billington too had heard.

THEY strained their hearing to catch a further sound. Half an hour passed. Still there was nothing but fog and silence. Then there was a whisper in the waist-high corn. It came nearer; it grew to a soft rustle. And then six rows from the edge of the field, not more than twenty-five feet from the two men, a head and shoulders appeared as a dark splotch in the fog. The head and shoulders were motionless.

Gregory pressed Billington's forearm. He found the muscles hard as a rock. Billington was standing like a statue. Gregory removed his hand. He had no need to worry about Billington. He drew his pistol from his pocket and held it ready, his finger resting lightly on the trigger.

The head and shoulders began to move through the corn. Meeker stepped from the last row ten feet away. For a moment he stood looking up at the house, listening. Gregory saw that he again wore the half-mask which he had worn on the night of the attack in the road. After a moment of intense listening, Meeker moved toward the rear of the house. He was lost to view around the corner.

"Come on," Gregory whispered to Billington. "He's gone to the back door, I think. Don't interfere unless you have to. Leave him to me. I owe him a little debt, and this seems a good time to pay it."

They ran noiselessly to the rear of the house over the smooth, heavy turf. Meeker's figure was outlined on the rear porch. Gregory saw something metallic gleam in his hand.

"He's forcing the rear door," Gregory told himself. "He knows no one will hear him there. He must be familiar with the inside of the house, too. He understands he has only to go along the hall and through the front room to reach Ramsdell's bedroom. . . . . It's just as I thought. He means to murder Ramsdell, so that the will shall become immediately effective. . . . . My God, to think that girl was their instrument in this."

A wave of intense hate toward Meeker swept through him. He could not believe that Helen had known the men's ultimate object, but if she had, he believed she had been their unwilling tool. Somehow they had forced her to obey them. Gregory had a savage impulse to send a bullet crashing into the thug's body.

But he beat his anger back. There was more to be done. Meeker had information which Gregory needed. He would choke a confession from Meeker's foul lips, he told himself.

When he thought Meeker had had time nearly to finish picking the lock of the door, he advanced toward him. Meeker was intent upon his work. Gregory had his revolver in his hand. Meeker did not hear him till Gregory was directly behind him. Then he turned swiftly. Gregory leveled his gun and commanded him to throw up

his hands. Meeker made a motion to obey—and then, with a physical courage which even in that moment Gregory had to give him credit for, he leaped at Gregory.

GREGORY had never shot a man, and now the thought of shooting Meeker sickened him. Meeker had had no time to draw a weapon. Gregory clubbed his pistol and took a backward step. As Meeker came at him, Gregory struck at him, but the blow only grazed Meeker's shoulder.

Meeker closed with him. Gregory dropped his pistol on the grass. Meeker fought tigrishly, but Gregory succeeded in catching his right hand in his own left, and he slowly bent it backward and forced it upward toward Meeker's shoulder. Meeker's hold relaxed. His hand went to his coat pocket. When he withdrew it, a knife flashed in it.

"Look out," Billington yelled. "Jump back and let me pepper him."

The knife described a half-circle. Gregory saw it was aimed at his heart. He dropped to his knees, and his hand came into contact with his gun. The knife passed over his head. Before Meeker could regain his poise, Gregory lifted the automatic, aimed at Meeker's shoulder and pulled the trigger. The knife dropped from Meeker's hand, and he slid down to the grass.

Gregory knelt above him and went through his pockets. His search brought forth a revolver, a silk handkerchief and a small bottle.

"Chloroform," said Gregory. "You were going to kill Ramsdell, weren't you, Meeker?"

Meeker cursed him but made no answer. They carried him around to the front porch. As they arrived there, a light appeared on the lower floor. Ramsdell met them at the doorway.

"Go back, Mr. Ramsdell," Gregory said. "We've had a little scrap, but everything is all right now. I guess we've caught a burglar."

"Never mind about me," Ramsdell retorted. "I may have a weak heart, but nobody ever said it was a timid one. Bring the gentleman in."

They carried Meeker into the hall and from there into the room beyond. Billington forced him into a chair and stood guard over him.

"Billington, you had better call Dr. Blake and then the sheriff," Gregory said. "I'll give this fellow a little first aid."

While Billington complied, Gregory dressed Meeker's wound temporarily. As he finished, he glanced up the stairs; his attention attracted by a slight sound there. Then he stared. Helen was standing at the head of the stairs, looking down at the group below.

"You had better go back to your room, Miss Ramsdell," Gregory said. "We've caught a burglar. That's all. It's over now. Mr. Ramsdell is all right."

The girl had fixed her eyes, grown somewhat wild, on the man in the chair, the half-mask dropped down about his throat.

Instead of obeying Gregory, she came down the stairs like a woman walking in her sleep. She was fully dressed, as she had been when she had returned from the beach.

When she reached the bottom of the stairs, she clung to the post. She turned toward Gregory.

"Where is the other man—Daly?"

"He wasn't with Meeker," Gregory answered. "We haven't caught him, but I know where he is. I'll get him presently."

RAMSDELL went over to the girl. "What is it, Helen?" he asked kindly. "You look like a ghost. There is nothing to be frightened about."

The girl drew herself up. Gregory could see that she was battling with herself to keep her sanity, so that she might be able to talk coherently.

"Mr. Ramsdell," she said, "these men—Meeker and Daly—forced me to come here as your niece. I am not your niece. I am in no way related to you. I lied when I said I worked in Chicago. I worked for Daly in Cleveland. Meeker is a professional criminal. When you hired Daly to find your relatives, he and Meeker planned this substitution. I am an impostor, but oh, I didn't wish to be. They made me. And now Daly will kill my brother."

CHAPTER VII

A Visitor

GREGORY saw a stricken look come into Ramsdell's eyes. It was as if something which had been comforting his soul had suddenly died in it. He looked down at her for a moment, and then the stricken look gave way to one of profound pity.

"Tell us about it, Helen," he said gently. "Gregory has caught one man. He may be able to get the other before the other harms your brother."

Helen fixed her eyes on Gregory's face. In spite of her terror, her regard of him seemed to say that she had at least justified herself in the things she had done.

"I had—I have—a little brother," she said. "They stole him away when he was leaving school one day by saying I had been called out of town. He had been to Daly's office once with me, and I suppose he trusted Daly. Daly told me this, and he said he would kill my brother if I didn't do as he said. They laid all their plans very carefully. Before they kidnaped my brother, Daly went to Mr. Ramsdell's home in Michigan and found out everything he could about Mr. Ramsdell's family. He discovered that they had all died except a son of Mr. Ramsdell's sister. That son had gone away and had not been heard from since the death of his mother. Mr. Daly was able to get hold of two or three old letters which the sister and the brother had written. They did not speak of the brother's daughter, of course, for he never had a daughter. Then Daly forged a birth-certificate which he said he had copied from the county records. He gave the letters and the certificate to me and coached me so that I was able to answer any question Mr. Ramsdell put to me. I loathed myself for the part I had to play, but what could I do? They said they would kill Bobby. They said that if either of them failed to return from a given errand, Bobby would die. They made me meet them at the beach, and they constantly urged me to have Mr. Ramsdell draw up his will. I never suspected they meant to harm Mr. Ramsdell. If I had, I should have told him everything in spite of Bobby's peril. They said Bobby would be returned to me as soon as the will was drawn. That's why I urged Mr. Gregory to act at once. I know I did wrong, but I loved Bobby so. He was so little to be in their hands, so—"

She had come to the end of her strength. She sank down on the lower step of the stairs and buried her face in her hands.

"And Daly will do it, too," Meeker growled.

WHILE the girl had talked, Gregory had been a prey to varied emotions. He was profoundly sorry for the girl. He regretted that he had not trusted her. And he was furious at Daly and Meeker. His brain whirled back over the past and up to the present again. He must do something at once to save the child.

He crossed swiftly to Helen and assisted her to rise.

"We must have courage," he said, "though that seems a poor thing to say to you now. Nothing has happened to your brother as yet. You can see that from what Meeker has said. We have Meeker in our own hands to do with as we please. Daly will do nothing if Meeker reports to him that he has been successful in his mission. Will you leave Meeker to me for a little while?"

The girl looked at him pleadingly. She hardly dared hope, and yet she saw that he offered the one way out. Everything depended upon what he could force Meeker to do.

"Tell me just what to do," she whispered.

"Go to your room and remain there," Gregory said. "I will do everything I can, and as soon as possible I will let you know what we have accomplished."

The girl went slowly up the stairs. At the top she turned and looked at Gregory again. The goodness which Gregory had felt in her all along was shining in her face in spite of its extreme pallor. She disappeared around the banister.

Albert appeared in the doorway and announced Dr. Blake, who entered close after him. Gregory explained what had happened.

"Please dress the wound as quickly as you can," Gregory said. "We have no time to lose."

The Doctor worked rapidly. He said the bullet had not lodged in Meeker's shoulder. He pronounced the wound not serious.

WHEN he had gone, Gregory turned on Meeker savagely. Meeker looked up at him sullenly. Gregory had seen his type often in the beginning of his legal practice when he had appeared at the criminal bar. He knew that at heart the man was a coward. Sheer brutality enabled Meeker to do the things he did. Gregory was sure that his spirit would waver, now that he was out in the open.

"You've got your chance right now, Meeker," Gregory said. "You will never have another. If you don't do as I say, I'll see that you suffer for what you've done here, and I'll search your past till I find out every crime you've committed. What're you going to do?"

Meeker's face went white. Into his eyes came the terror which the criminal feels when a threat comes ringing to him from the world of law and order. Meeker had paid for many of his crimes by terms in prison, but like all men of his kind, he had debts—big debts—to society which he had never paid. He was well aware that if he had to pay for all of those, he would never have a day's freedom again. And in his world there were men whom he designated as dishonest—snitches, stool-pigeons. There were men who hated him, too—men of his own class whom he had betrayed. There were all the perils of the underworld. Those might be greater than his present peril. He had killed two men in his career of crime.

And he saw that Gregory knew all that in a general way. Gregory knew that for once he is captured, a professional criminal commits a score of crimes and gets away.

"What do you want me to do?" Meeker mumbled.

"Were you to get word to Daly as soon as you had killed Mr. Ramsdell?"

"If it looked safe and easy. If I could get to a phone where there wouldn't be nobody that'd suspect. Daly's nervous. He was for having me rush to the village and phone. I wasn't takin' no chances. I told him he'd hear from me."

"Suppose he did not hear from you till morning."

"He wouldn't hear then."

"Would he kill the boy?"

MEEKER'S eyes dropped. He was puzzled as to what he should say. He had long ago ceased to expect mercy. He knew that his own shrewdness would wrest from Gregory and those who came after him in the prosecution the only leniency that would be shown him.

"You're gettin' this thing wrong end to, boss," he said. "You're figgerin' me as the leader in this here business. I aint. Daly is. He said he'd kill the boy if he didn't hear from me. That's all I know."

"Will you call up Daly and say you have succeeded?"

Gregory saw the crafty look which leaped into Meeker's eyes. Meeker, Gregory perceived, thought he saw an opening.

"I'll call him up from here, right now," he said.

Gregory smiled sardonically.

"And have him trace back the call to find out where it came from," he scoffed. "I guess not."

Meeker sighed.

"Smooth, aint you?" he said. "If I do the square thing, what do you promise me?"

"All I know about you is that you were trying to force an entrance into this house when I shot you," Gregory said. "The sheriff will be here in a few minutes. If we left at once, he wouldn't see you. If we don't leave at once, the sheriff will have to know the whole story. I presume Daly engineered the kidnaping."

Meeker leaped at that hungrily.

"You got the right dope there," he said. "I was workin' in the dark mostly. I never laid a hand on the kid. Daly got him. He was responsible. I was only to get into this house. I

didn't, and I didn't hurt Ramsdell. I might have come here only to rob, mightn't I?"

"You might," Gregory agreed.

"Well, hop to it," Meeker said. "I don't want to meet no sheriff just yet."

"Will you call Miss—" He paused. He didn't know the girl's real name. "What is her name?" he asked Meeker.

"Grayson is her last name," Meeker answered. "Helen's right for the getaway. Fer Gawd's sake, mister, rustle along. That sheriff will be here any minute. You want to remember that if he comes now it'll hurt you as much as it will me. You better take me while I'm in a frame of mind to do what you want."

"Will you call Miss Grayson, Mr. Ramsdell?" Gregory requested. "I'll be getting out my car."

WHEN he came back, having left the car in the driveway, Helen had come downstairs. He told her just what the situation was.

"I have no doubt I shall bring your brother back to you," he said.

"Can't I go with you?" she begged. "Waiting will be terrible."

"You couldn't help," Gregory said. "You might hinder. You will just have to trust me, please. I am as eager to save that boy as if he were my own brother."

"Very well," Helen said.

Gregory turned away. Billington brought Meeker out to the car. As Gregory drove down the road, he looked back. He could see the girl standing back of the screened door, staring after the car.

The fog had drifted inland now, and the air was clear. Over the horizon the moon was edging its way. Gregory's clock showed two. He came to the pavement in a few minutes, and then he sped the big car at its maximum speed. The smooth road slipped away under them; they encountered no other vehicles and saw no one. The sheriff would come from the other direction.

"Where's the next telephone exchange?" Gregory called to Billington.

Billington named a village.

"How far?"

"Ten miles."

They did not speak again till the lights of the village showed ahead of them. Gregory stopped the car in the shadow this side of the lights.

"Now, Meeker," he said, "just what were you to say to Daly?"

"Why, I was to tell him I had succeeded," Meeker answered.

"In those words?"

Meeker swallowed hard. All the way from Ramsdell's he had been turning his predicament over in his mind. He sought a way out, as he always sought a way when he was in trouble. In his younger days he had taken chances, but he knew from bitter experience that he never gained anything by taking those chances. Besides, Gregory had an uncanny way of ferreting out hidden things. It came to him now that perhaps Gregory knew more than he had disclosed. This might be merely a test. Daly might already be in the hands of the police. The sweat of fear came to his forehead.

"No," he answered thickly. "I was to say, 'I'm on my way to see you.'"

"By the way," Gregory said, "how were you to get back to Cleveland? If you're telling me the truth, you had some means ready."

"You'll find a car down by the beach," Meeker said, glad that he could answer one question without pondering it.

"Will you go to the exchange, call Daly, and repeat what you have just said to me?" Gregory demanded.

"Yes."

Gregory got down, leaving Billington to watch the machine. With Meeker he went up to the exchange.

"What is the number?" Gregory asked carelessly.

Meeker gave him Daly's number, which Gregory already knew. So far Meeker was running straight. Gregory asked the girl to make the connection.

THEY had to wait fifteen minutes before the girl said, "There they are."

"Go into the booth and talk to him," Gregory said.

Meeker stepped into the booth; Gregory crowded in after him. Meeker took down the receiver and said "Hello!" There was a pause, while

Meeker licked his lips. Then he said: "I'm on my way to see you."

He waited for no answer but restored the receiver to its hook. When they were outside, Gregory asked: "What did he say?"

"Nothin' after he said 'Hello.' He wasn't to say nothin'. I heard him give a kind of a gasp, and that was all. He's yellow."

They returned to the machine and started cityward. The first faint streaks of dawn were coming into the sky as they stopped at the head of the street on which Daly lived.

All three went down the street, Gregory urging Meeker along with a hand on his arm. When they were near the house, Gregory stopped.

"Do you know how they sleep?" he asked.

"The boy and Daly's housekeeper sleep upstairs. Daly sleeps downstairs."

"Where is his room in relation to the room in which the telephone is located?" Gregory asked.

Meeker stared at him.

"How do you know where the phone is?" he demanded.

"Never mind," Gregory replied. "I know. Answer me."

"You're going to turn me over to the sheriff on that one charge, aint you?" Meeker asked.

"I am."

"Daly's room is across the hall from that one," Meeker said.

"Can you pick the lock of the back door?" said Gregory.

"I c'n pick most any lock," Meeker answered with a flash of pride.

"Come on, then," Gregory ordered. "Daly may be awake. We'll have to approach the house from the rear. We'll go through this yard on a chance that we wont be noticed by the people in the house. If we are noticed, I'll have to explain as best I can."

They walked rapidly across the lawn of a house two doors removed from Daly's. The back yards of the houses were unfenced, and they gained Daly's yard without, apparently, having been seen. But the eastern horizon was growing pink. They would have to move cautiously and quickly.

Meeker took out the tool he had been using at Ramsdell's and applied himself to the lock of Daly's back door. He soon pushed the door ajar. They stepped into the kitchen.

"Keep Meeker here, Billington," Gregory said.

He drew his revolver and started on tiptoe toward the front room where Daly was.

CHAPTER VIII

Trapped

HALFWAY along the hall Gregory stopped suddenly. It had occurred to him that his first duty—and now that he thought of it, his first desire—was to rescue Helen's little brother. He did not know what kind of man Daly, cornered, would prove to be. Undoubtedly he would be armed. In his passion at being caught he might get a moment's freedom and carry out his threat against Bobby.

Gregory went back to Meeker and Billington on tiptoe.

"Where, exactly, does the lad sleep?" he asked.

"In a room right at the top of the stairs," Meeker answered. "The woman sleeps two doors beyond that. Why don't you get Daly? He's liable to come out any minute, and he may start something. He's nervous, I tell you, and a nervous man with a gun is all-fired hell, plain."

"I'll get him," Gregory answered. "Shut up."

He gained the foot of the stairs without mishap. Daly's door was just at his elbow. As he paused a moment, listening, he heard Daly walk across the room. His revolver ready, Gregory waited for Daly to open the door. But Daly merely retraced his steps. Gregory went swiftly up the stairs.

The door of the room which Meeker had indicated was open. He stepped inside. In the light which was now filling the room, he saw the boy lying in bed. His fair hair was tousled, and his cheeks were flushed with sleep; one arm was flung out along the cover. Bobby, at least, did not seem to have worried about anything.

Gregory closed the door and advanced to the bed. He laid a hand lightly on Bobby's cheek. Bobby stirred and murmured. Then the quality of his breathing changed. There was a moment of silent waiting on Gregory's part. Then he gently shook the boy, and Bobby's eyes unclosed. He stared up at the man above him sleepily.

"Bobby," Gregory whispered, "don't make a sound. I've come from your sister. I am going to take you away from here. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Bobby whispered back.

"Daly meant to harm you," Gregory went on. "I'm going to save you from him. I left your sister only a couple of hours ago. She's in the country waiting for you. You want to go back to her, don't you? You must trust me, you know."

"Sure, I want to see her," Bobby said.

"Where are your clothes?" Gregory asked.

"Right over there on a chair," the boy answered. "I can get into 'em by myself. Where's Mr. Daly? He was awful cross last night."

"He's downstairs," Gregory said. "I'll 'tend to him in a minute. Can you dress without making a bit of noise?"

"Yes sir. I know I can."

"Slip out of bed then, and hustle. We've no time to waste."

Bobby slid from the bed.

"I'm all dressed but my shoes," he said after a bit. "They're in that closet over there."

Gregory got the shoes from the closet.

"Don't put them on now," he said. "Carry them and come downstairs with me."

BOBBY followed him, making no noise. At the foot of the stairs Gregory paused again to listen. Daly was still keeping up his march back and forth across the room.

Gregory took the boy to the kitchen and turned him over to Billington. Then he went back to get Daly. Billington wanted to take his place, but Gregory would not permit that.

Outside Daly's door Gregory stood still a moment, his gun in his hand. Daly approached the door and walked away from it. Then there was a brief silence in the room. Gregory saw that Daly was walking from the door to a window and pausing at the window to look out. Evidently he was growing impatient because Meeker did not come. Gregory let him make one more trip to the door and back to the window. Then Gregory put his hand on the knob and turned it. It yielded, and he opened the door.

At the sound of the opening of the door, Daly wheeled away from the window. Gregory stopped on the threshold, his gun leveled at Daly's breast. Daly's face slowly took on a pasty look. Terror came into his eyes. He stood a moment motionless. Then the dull red of anger surged over the grayness of his face, and his eyes grew hot.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded.

Gregory stepped into the room, his revolver still menacing Daly. He closed the door behind him.

"I've come for you, Daly," he said. "You've fallen down on your job."

"Job?" Daly snarled. "What job? I don't know what you're talking about, but I do know I'll have you arrested for burglarious entry."

"You'll do it from a cell, then," Gregory smiled. "Meeker is out in the kitchen. I was standing at his elbow when he telephoned to you. . . . . He failed to kill Ramsdell. I put a bullet into his shoulder. If you make a move I don't like, I'll put one into you. I'd just as lief as not."

Stark amazement held Daly transfixed for a moment. Then his hand went to his hip pocket.

"Throw up your hands," Gregory cried. "Quick, or I'll fire."

Daly's hands went slowly above his head.

"Turn your face toward the window and keep your hands up," Gregory said. "I'm going to take that gun away from you."

Daly obeyed. Gregory advanced to him and took the gun from his pocket.

"Now, then, I'm going to tell you something," Gregory said. "You kidnaped Miss Grayson's brother so that you could make her pretend she was

Ramsdell's niece. As soon as Ramsdell made his will, Meeker came to his house to murder him. You intended to betray Miss Grayson still further by holding her brother till she had paid you a large sum of money. That's straight, isn't it?"

"You say it is," Daly choked out. "You've got to prove it."

"I'm getting evidence," Gregory said. "You can come upstairs with me for a moment."

They went into the hall, and Gregory forced Daly to precede him up the stairs. As they reached the top, the housekeeper came from her room.

"What's happened?" she asked. "I heard you talkin' down there."

"How did Bobby Grayson happen to be in this house?" Gregory asked.

"Why, Mr. Daly brought him here. His name aint Grayson. It's Colvin. Daly said he was his sister's child, and she was ill."

"Daly kidnaped that boy," Gregory said.

The woman exclaimed. Gregory ordered Daly to return downstairs.

"We're piecing it out bit by bit, Daly," he said.

DALY turned bitter eyes on him. Gregory saw the look, but he could not know of the desperation which was burning in Daly's heart. Daly knew that he faced a long prison-term if he did not outwit Gregory.

They were halfway down the stairs when he suddenly turned and seized Gregory about the knees. Gregory's hands came down in an involuntary effort to save himself. He clutched at the banister. As he did so, he dropped his gun and it fell through the railing to the floor below.

Daly used all his strength to throw Gregory over his head so that he would go crashing down the stairs. But Gregory seized his shoulders in an iron grip. They wrestled on the insecure footing which the stair-step offered, and then they both lost their balance and rolled to the bottom of the stairs.

Gregory's head struck the hard floor. For a moment he was dizzy. Daly jerked himself loose and ran toward Gregory's revolver. Gregory's strength came back to him as he realized his peril; he had no doubt that Daly would shoot him if he got the revolver in his hand.

He sprang after Daly and closed with him as Daly straightened up clutching the gun. Gregory seized the hand which held the gun and fought desperately to mak Daly drop it. Daly fought back like a wild man.

Gregory heard the door at the end of the hall opened. He feared Billington was coming to his aid, leaving the boy with Meeker.

"Keep back, Billington," he cried. "Watch Meeker. Don't let him harm that child, whatever you do. Never mind about me."

As he struggled with Daly, he glanced up. He saw Billington coming along the hall with Meeker in front of him.

"You stand over there where I can keep an eye on you, Meeker," Billington said. "I'll just give this lad a clip back of the ear."

At that moment Gregory had got Daly's gun-hand in both of his own. Despite the fact that Daly was clawing at him with his other hand, he wrenched the gun-hand so that Daly had to release his hold. The gun dropped to the floor once more. Gregory kicked it toward Billington, and Billington picked it up. Then Gregory pushed Daly away from him.

"Come on, now," he said furiously. "If you want a man-to-man scrap, you can have it."

He put up his guard and prepared to rush Daly. Daly started to lift his own hands, and then his nerve suddenly deserted him. He cowered back against the wall and covered his face with his hands.

"I've got enough," he said.

"Bah," said Meeker, "you yellow dawg!"

Daly lifted his head slowly. He turned his gaze on Meeker, and it was the gaze of a man whose blood is chilled by fear.

"You got me into this, Meeker," he said. "And then you threw me down. You botched the game at the last minute. I might have known you couldn't go through with it."

"Well, I made the play, anyways," Meeker said hardily. "I had the nerve to try, and that was more than you had."

"I suppose you've told this man everything you know," Daly said.

"I figger on savin' my own hide if I can," said Meeker. "If you was a reg'lar pal of mine, I'd of stood by you, but you aint nothin' but a yellow cur. Why should I waste myself on you?"

Daly turned to Gregory.

"If you'll come in here, I'll tell you the whole business," he said.

GREGORY followed him into his room. Daly sat down on the edge of the bed. He seemed to have added years to his age in the last few minutes; shadows were coming beneath his eyes; his face was pale and drawn.

"I was going to give Ramsdell a square deal when he hired me," he said. "I've been square for eight years now. Before that I trained with men like Meeker. I got into trouble and was sent to prison. Meeker was there at the time. We were let out together. He has blackmailed me more or less ever since, in a small way.

"I've tried not to be the ordinary scandal-collecting detective. I've turned down a lot of business of that kind. Gradually I built up a business among business men. That's why Ramsdell hired me. I had worked for him before, and he had found me honest.

"The night I came away from Ramsdell I was pretty much elated. Ramsdell promised me a whopping big fee if I could find any of his relatives. The old boy had undergone a terrific reaction from his past. He was strong for making amends.

"Well, I'm not a drinking man, but that night I stopped into a place near my office to get a bottle of beer. Meeker was there. He borrowed twenty dollars from me. I let him have it without complaining. He saw I had struck something, and after a while he got it out of me. When I left the place, he followed me. . . . . Well, there was something in my past that had never been cleared up. There was something I had never paid for. There almost always is when a man goes wrong. And almost always somebody knows about it. In my case Meeker knew about it. He'd never held it over me very strong before, but that night he did. He's got brains in a rough kind of a way, and he'd evolved this whole plot while we had stood in that barroom. Prison is hell for me—always was. He could have sent me to prison. So I yielded. Once I got into the thing, I got avaricious. I wanted a piece of Ramsdell's money. I guess you know the rest from the time we held you up to see if you had Ramsdell's will on you. . . . . I'm done for. You're a lawyer, Gregory. Can't you do something for me?"

"Meeker says you're yellow, Daly," Gregory said sarcastically. "Are you?"

Daly held up his head.

"No; I'm not yellow. What could I do when he had it on me?"

"You could have taken your medicine," Gregory said. "You could have refused to hide behind a woman's skirts. You could have refused to use a little child as your key to freedom. I don't think you've got any reason to whine to me or to anybody else for mercy. Meeker was willing to take a desperate chance, while you hid here with the boy. You're as bad as Meeker, but you haven't got his nerve."

Daly's eyes held an ugly look. He spat out an oath.

"Yes," Gregory jeered, "that's the real Daly. It wont do you any good to whimper. Come out in the hall."

DALY followed sullenly. He cursed Meeker.

"Curse right along," Meeker sneered. "You're goin' to pay a bigger bill than I am, old pal. I've got this guy's promise that he's on'y goin' to hand me over to the sheriff for tryin' to break into Ramsdell's house. I guess I wont get so long a spell as you will."

Daly's eyes glowed. His lips curled away from his locked teeth.

"Is that so, Meeker?" he hissed. "Well, you'll get whatever I get. I'm going to spill the whole story. Before I get through, the court'll know that you planned the kidnaping and the murder. It'll know just what you were breaking into Ramsdell's house for. You put it over on me. You dragged

me into this. You said I was yellow. I'll show you how yellow I am. When they get through indicting you, they'll need a ream of paper to write the indictments on."

"And I'll spill everything I know about you," Meeker declared.

Gregory laughed. Meeker looked at him.

"What tickles you?" he demanded.

"I rather thought, when I gave you my promise, that things would work out about like this," Gregory answered.

Meeker looked at him spitefully.

"Clever, aint you?" he spat out.

"Not very," Gregory replied. "I don't need to be to get by with a thug like you, Meeker."

CHAPTER IX

Of His Own Blood

NOW Gregory called Helen on the telephone and gently told her that he was bringing her brother back to her. She cried out her joy and urged him to hasten.

On their way back to Ramsdell's, they stopped at the county seat. The sheriff had been to Ramsdell's and returned.

Gregory explained. The sheriff received his two prisoners joyfully. He rarely entertained guests so distinguished.

Gregory turned the car toward home then. The boy sat beside him.

When they drove into the front yard, Gregory saw the girl come to the door. She stood there a moment, gazing out at her brother. Then she opened the door and ran down the steps. Bobby gave a whoop and sprang from the machine. He was in his sister's arms. Gregory looked once at her as she knelt, holding the boy close up to her. Then he drove the car to the garage.

Billington went home, and Gregory was undecided what to do. He did not wish to intrude upon the girl in her happiness. As he stood in the yard, Albert came to the door and called to him.

"Mr. Ramsdell wishes to see you," he said.

Gregory entered the house. Ramsdell and Helen and Bobby were in the library.

"Helen and I have had a long talk, Gregory," Ramsdell said. "She thinks she almost committed a crime in doing as she did. But what else could she do? She was at the mercy of those two men. I don't blame her a bit. Do you —even as a lawyer?"

"Not in the least," Gregory said. "It took rare courage for her to go through with Daly's plans."

"Of course I have no niece now," Ramsdell said. "But I'm going to make Helen my heir if she will consent. If I have relatives anywhere, there will be enough for them too. I have been wondering, Gregory, if you would undertake to find out for me if my sister or my brother left any children, or indeed if either of them is alive."

"Neither of them is alive," Gregory returned. "Your brother had no children. Your sister had one child—a son. But he is so well provided for that he doesn't need any help. You had better accept Miss Grayson as your niece now."

Gregory stole a look at the girl. She was leaning forward in her chair, her lips parted.

"When you came here, you knew I was an impostor," she said. "How did you know that?"

GREGORY looked into her eyes for a moment. They were very clear and bright now, since the shadow of worry had passed from them. Then Gregory turned to Ramsdell.

"Because," he said slowly, "I am Mr. Ramsdell's nephew."

"My sister's son," Ramsdell said.

"Your sister's son," said Gregory.

"I see," Ramsdell said. "You read in the newspapers that old Ramsdell, business pirate, had undergone a change of heart and had taken his niece into his home so that he could leave his fortune to one of his own kin."

"And I knew that you had no niece," Gregory smiled. "It rather went against my legal conscience to see you imposed upon, so I came down here to investigate. I didn't want to see you defrauded, my dear uncle."

"I should have thought you would be

glad to see almost anything happen to me," Ramsdell said. "Your mother must have talked about me. She must have been bitter toward me."

"When I was a lad, she was very bitter, especially when you did not answer that one sad letter she wrote you," Gregory said. "But I was always a strong boy. At fifteen I could do a man's work. I always worked in summer, and in winter while I was going to school I worked mornings and evenings. As soon as I was graduated from high school, I went to Cleveland. I got through college by working summers and mornings and evenings. I was able to support myself and help my mother. As soon as I was graduated, I got a job in the offices of a firm of corporation lawyers. For some reason or other they liked me, and they shoved me along. Then when I struck out for myself, I was almost immediately successful. My mother died only two years ago. In her last years she was not only comfortable. She had luxuries. She came in the end to speak of you admiringly. She said you were the only one in the family besides myself—pardon me—that had any brains."

"And besides brains you had a conscience," Ramsdell said. "I had one, but I drugged it till just lately."

Gregory walked across the room.

"You never can tell what the fruit of your acts will be," he said quietly. "I don't count myself a big man, for I'm not. I told Meeker that I was just clever enough to get by. It's been a grind for me, and sometimes the grind was almost a little too much for me. There were times when I thought I'd chuck my own conscience overboard and live for myself alone. But once when I was a boy, my mother said to me: 'You are a good deal like your uncle. He succeeded, and so will you. But oh, don't ever be like him. He had brains, but he had no heart. He was not kind. Always be kind, my son.' And so when I got that impulse to show a yellow streak, as Meeker would say, I thought of you. And I kept going. Don't you see that if you hadn't set the example, I would probably have done the very thing you did?"

"I wish I could believe that," Ramsdell said. "I will try to believe it. My boy, you don't need anything from me. Will you draw up a new will for me, naming Miss Grayson as my heir?"

"Oh, you mustn't do that," Helen objected.

"I don't know who's to prevent me," Ramsdell said. "If Gregory wont draw up the will, my own lawyer will. He'll be back at the end of the month."

"I'll consider it a privilege and will gladly override Miss Grayson's objections," Gregory said with a smile. "Now, I told Bobby on the way home that I'd take him fishing this morning. I see he's out on the lawn, waiting with the patience of a young Job. He told me to ask his sister to go along. I second the motion."

HELEN'S color flamed up into her face—for no reason at all that a careless observer would have seen.

"Why, I'd like to go," she said. "But oughtn't you to sleep?"

"I'll have plenty of time to sleep," Gregory said. "I was never more wide awake in my life."

Gregory went out to the machine.

"Gregory's a pretty decent sort of fellow, Helen," Ramsdell said.

"He seems to be," the girl agreed.

"Seems?" Ramsdell repeated ironically. "Great guns, my dear child, you are lovelier than ever with that color in your cheeks and that sparkle in your eyes. All along I've wanted you to smile like that. . . . . You'd better run along."

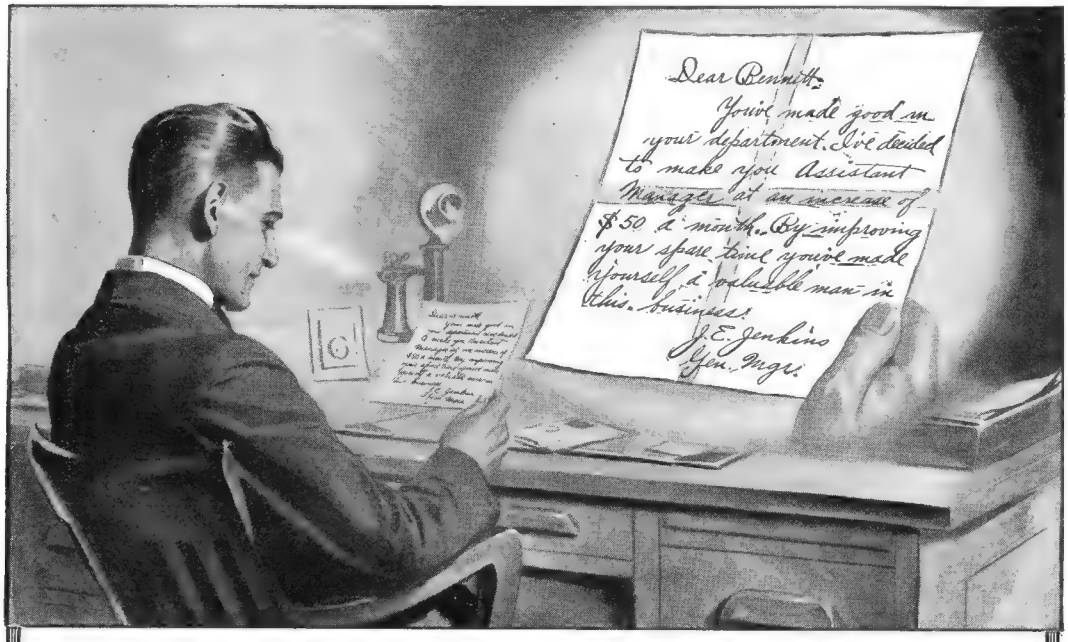
Helen "ran along." As Ramsdell went out on the porch, Gregory was helping her into the machine. They drove away toward the lake road. At the corner, both the girl and Gregory turned around and waved their hands gayly.

Ramsdell sat on the porch for a long time. There was a musing look in his eyes.

"I think I'll be here long enough to call her my niece, after all," he said. "I think I will."

And it didn't take all of his perspicacity to come to that conclusion, either.

THE END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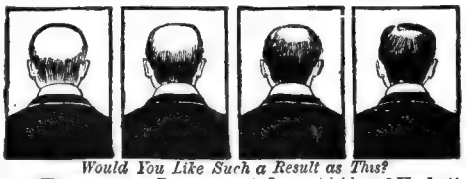

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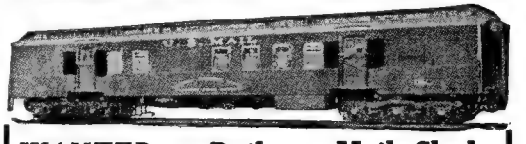

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Earn $2,500 to $10,000 Yearly

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Are you progressing fast enough in the selling field—are you in the $5,000 to $10,000 Class? If not, you **need more training**—more sales coaching—more power to persuade people to purchase your products. You may not have selected the line of goods best adapted to your particular ability—there may be any one of a hundred reasons why you are not one of the **big successful men in the selling field today.** Investigate our methods and learn how you can increase your income. Hundreds of salesmen having from two to twenty years' experience have used our selling plans and methods—**hundreds have increased their earnings** from fifty to five hundred per cent.

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"For ten years I worked for a railroad. Was drawing $75 a month when I left. You secured me my position. I have earned $375 in a month. Success would have been impossible without your help."—E. C. Kisler, 2121 Andrews St., Rockford, Ill.

We are especially well equipped to accurately and efficiently develop you into the highest type of salesman—just as we did this man.

Free Book—"A Knight of the Grip"

Let us send you this valuable 64-page book containing a "History of Salesmanship" and showing you how to become a successful salesman and earn from $2,500 to $10,000 yearly. **Send the coupon** and we will also send you a **special list** of the many lines of business in which **good positions are open for salesmen.** Address nearest office. **Department—22-A.**

National Salesmen's Training Ass'n. Dept. 22-A
Chicago—San Francisco—New York

MAIL THIS COUPON (Send your request to the office nearest your home)

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No craving for tobacco in any form when you begin taking Tobacco Redeemer.

Don't try to quit the tobacco habit unaided. It's a losing fight against heavy odds and means a serious shock to the nervous system. Let the tobacco habit quit YOU. It will quit you, if you will just take **Tobacco Redeemer,** according to directions for two or three days. It is a most marvelously quick and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

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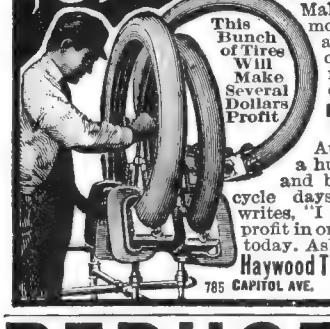

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50c. Box FREE

ALSO BOOK ON SELF-REDUCING

We haven't space to tell of all the good ADIPO is doing, but as an instance, **Laura A. Fouch, McConnellsville, Ohio, Says:** "ADIPO took off 84 pounds 3 years ago and the reduction has been **permanent.**" **Effie Click, Keokuk, Iowa, says:** "ADIPO made a new woman of me. It took off 70 pounds 2 years ago and I have not regained a single pound. **Mr. John McGowan, Memramcook, N. B., Canada, says:** "I believe I would be in my grave to-day but for ADIPO. It reduced me 105 pounds and now feel fine."

What ADIPO has done for these and hundreds of other men and women all over the Country it should also do for you. We are particularly anxious to reach those who have tried other methods and failed. Just send your address by letter or postal and receive the **Free** 50c box and illustrated book by return mail, post-paid. We send thousands of these Free trial packages all over the world.

Address: **THE ADIPO CO., 4066 Beard Building, NEW YORK CITY.**

Send 15c today for this complete Midget Manicure Set

Tear off the coupon now and send it to us with 15c—10c for the manicure set and 5c for postage and packing—and we will send you a midget manicure set of Cutex preparations, complete with orange stick, emery boards and absorbent cotton. Enough for six "manicures." Send for it today.

This complete manicure set sent for 15c

Why cutting ruins the cuticle

How you can keep it smooth and firm without cutting

START today to have the shapely, well-kept nails that make any hand beautiful. See how quickly, how easily you can have the most wonderful manicure—see how smooth and firm Cutex keeps your cuticle without trimming or cutting it; how lovely it makes your nails look!

What specialists say about cuticle cutting

Dr. Murray, the famous specialist, says: "On no account trim the cuticle with scissors. This leaves a raw, bleeding edge which will give rise to hangnails, and often makes the rim of flesh about the nail become sore and swollen."

Over and over, other specialists repeat the advice—"Do not trim the cuticle." "Under no circumstances should scissors or knife touch the cuticle." "Cutting is ruinous."

It was to meet this need for a *harmless* cuticle remover that the Cutex formula was prepared.

Cutex completely does away with cuticle cutting; leaves the skin at the base of the nail smooth and firm, unbroken.

The new way to manicure

In the Cutex package you will find orange stick and absorbent cotton. Wrap a little cotton around the end of the stick and dip it into the Cutex bottle. Carefully work the stick around the base of the nail, gently pushing back the cuticle. Almost at once you will find you can wipe off the dead surplus skin. Then rinse the hands in clear water.

A touch of Cutex Nail White—a soft, white cream—removes all discolorations from underneath the nails.

Cutex Cake Polish rubbed on the palm of the hand and passed quickly over the nails, gives them a delightful finish. Should you wish an especially brilliant, long-lasting polish, apply Cutex Paste Polish first, then the Cake Polish.

The first Cutex manicure makes a decided improvement

Until you use Cutex, you cannot realize what a great improvement even one application makes; you cannot know how attractive your nails can be made to look.

Where to get Cutex

Cutex manicure preparations are sold in all highclass drug stores and at the toilet goods counters of department stores.

Cutex comes in 50c bottles with an introductory size at 25c. The 50c bottle is the more economical size to buy—it will last three times as long as the 25c bottle. Extra large size bottles, $1.00. Cutex Nail White is 25c. Cutex Nail Polish in cake, paste, powder, liquid or stick form is also 25c. Cutex Cuticle Comfort, for sore or tender cuticle, is 25c. If your favorite store has not yet been supplied with Cutex, order direct from us and we will fill your order promptly.

NORTHAM WARREN

Dept. 601 9 West Broadway New York

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Includes such "top-notch" illustrators and designers as **Charles E. Chambers,** who illustrates the Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford stories; **Franklin Booth,** Painter with the Pen; **Harold Gross,** Designer for the Gorham Co.; **Edwin V. Brewer,** of "Cream of Wheat" fame; and others. **Exclusive original lessons especially prepared by these men are included in the Federal Course.**

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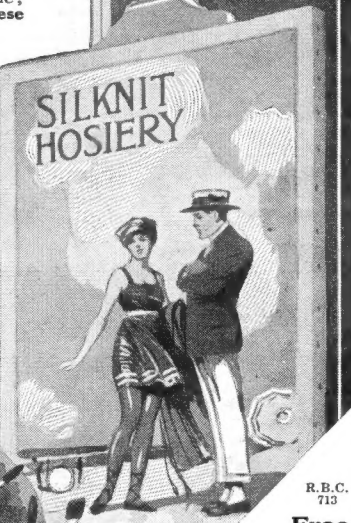

R.B.C. 713

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Name

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(Write your address plainly in margin)

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NOW BEING USED BY OVER THREE MILLION PEOPLE ANNUALLY

Quickly transforms flabby flesh, toneless tissues, and pallid cheeks of weak, anaemic men and women into a perfect glow of health and beauty—Often increases the strength of delicate, nervous, run-down folks 100 per cent in two weeks' time.

IT is conservatively estimated that over three million people annually in this country alone are taking Nuxated Iron. Such astonishing results have been reported from its use both by doctors and laymen, that a number of physicians in various parts of the country have been asked to explain why they prescribe it so extensively, and why it apparently produces so much better results than were obtained from the old forms of inorganic iron.

Extracts from some of the letters received are given below:

Dr. Ferdinand Kink, a New York physician and Medical Author, says: "There can be no vigorous iron men without iron." Pallor means anaemia. Anaemia means iron deficiency. The skin of anaemic men and women is pale —the flesh flabby. The muscles lack tone, the brain fags and the memory fails and they often become weak, nervous irritable, despondent and melancholy. When the iron goes from the blood of women, the roses go from their cheeks.

"I have used Nuxated Iron widely in my own practice in most severe aggravated conditions with unfailing results. I have induced many other physicians to give it a trial, all of whom have given me most surprising reports in regard to its great power as a health and strength builder."

Dr. E. Sauer, a Boston physician who has studied both in this country and in great European Medical Institutions, says: "As I have said a hundred times over, organic iron is the greatest of all strength builders.

"Not long ago a man came to me who was nearly half a century old and asked me to give him a preliminary examination for life insurance. I was astonished to find him with the blood pressure of a boy of twenty and as full of vigor, vim and vitality as a young man; in fact, a young man he really was, notwithstanding his age. The secret, he said, was taking iron—Nuxated Iron had filled him with renewed life. At thirty he was in bad health; at forty-six he was careworn and nearly all in—now at fifty, after taking Nuxated Iron, a miracle of vitality and his face beaming with the buoyancy of Youth.

Iron is absolutely necessary to enable your blood to change food into living tissue. Without it, no matter how much or what you eat, your food merely passes through you without doing you any good. You don't get the strength out of it, and as a consequence you become weak, pale and sickly looking, just like a plant trying to grow in a soil deficient in iron.

If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next take two five-grain tablets of ordinary nuxated iron three times per day for two weeks, then test your strength again and see how much you have gained. I have seen dozens of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while double their strength and endurance and entirely rid themselves of all symptoms of dyspepsia, liver and other troubles in from ten to fourteen days' time simply by taking iron in the proper form. And this after they had in some cases been doctoring for months without obtaining any benefit. But don't take the old forms of reduced iron, iron acetate, or tincture of iron simply to save a few cents. The iron demanded by Mother Nature for the red coloring matter in the blood of her children is, alas! not that kind of iron. You must take iron in a form that can be easily absorbed and assimilated to do you any good, otherwise it may prove worse than useless. Many an athlete and prize-fighter has won the day simply because he knew the secret of great strength and endurance, and filled his blood with iron before he went into the affray; while many another has gone down in inglorious defeat simply for the lack of iron.

Dr. H. B. Vail, formerly Physician in the Baltimore Hospital, and a Medical Examiner, says: "Throughout my experience on Hospital staffs and as Medical Examiner, I have been astonished at the number of patients who have vainly doctored for various diseases, when in reality their delicate, run-down state was simply the result of lack of iron in the blood.

"Time and again I have prescribed organic iron—Nuxated Iron—and surprised patients at the rapidity with which the weakness and general debility were replaced by a renewed feeling of strength and vitality. I took Nuxated Iron myself to build me up after a serious case of nervous exhaustion. The effects were apparent after a few days and within three weeks it had virtually revitalized my whole system and put me in a superb physical condition."

NOTE—Nuxated Iron, which is prescribed and recommended above by physicians in such a great variety of cases, is not a patent medicine nor secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists and whose iron constituents are widely prescribed by eminent physicians everywhere. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black nor upset the stomach; on the contrary, it is a most potent remedy in nearly all forms of indigestion, as well as for nervous, rundown conditions. The manufacturers have such great confidence in nuxated iron that they offer to forfeit $100.00 to any charitable institution if they cannot take any man or woman under 60 who lacks iron, and increase their strength 100 per cent or over in four weeks' time, provided they have no serious organic trouble. They also offer to refund your money if it does not at least double your strength and endurance in ten days' time. It is dispensed by all good druggists.

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